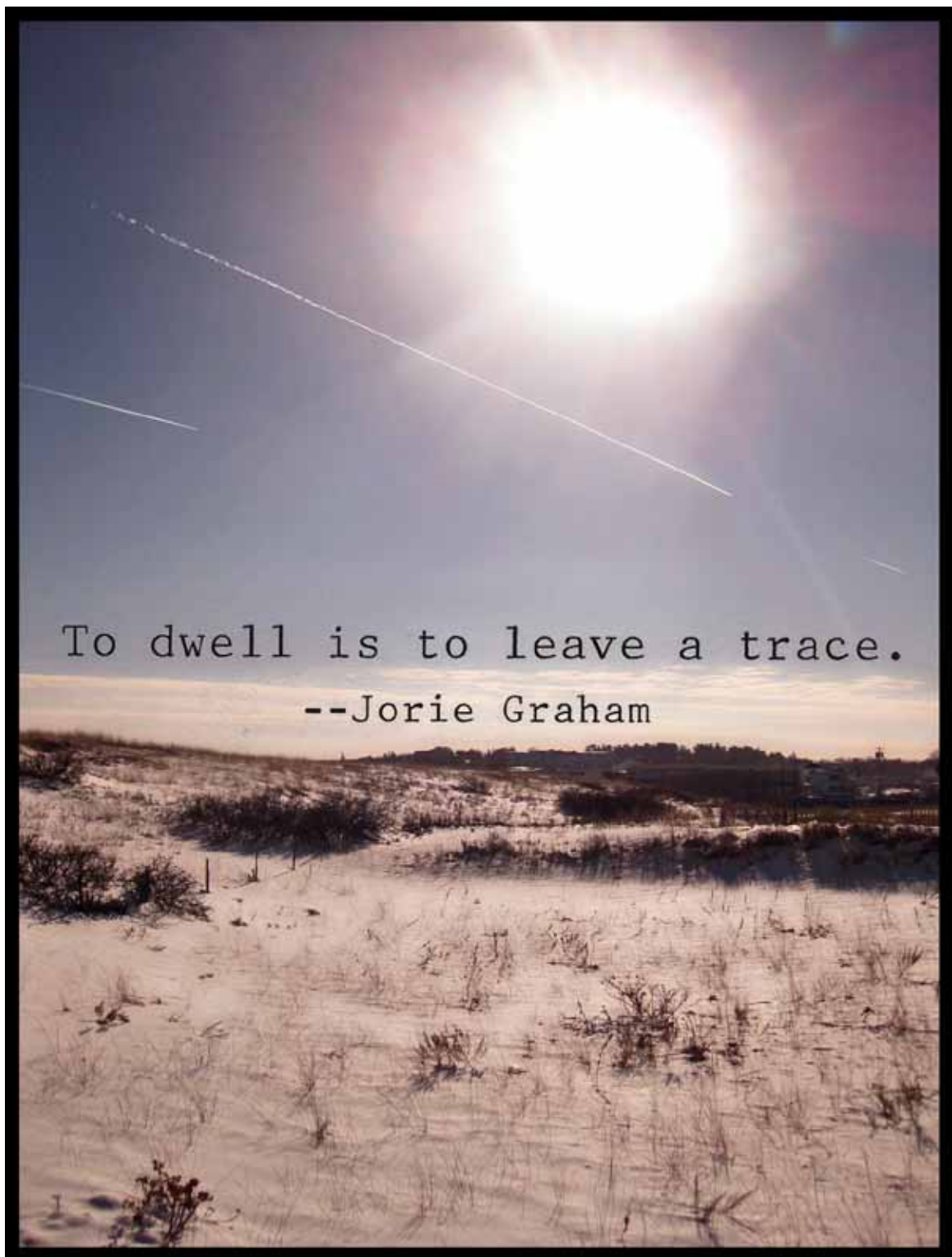


The Cenacle



19th Anniversary Issue
Number 88 | April 2014



To dwell is to leave a trace.

--Jorie Graham

April 24, 2014
14:41 p.m.
Harvard Square
Hubbards Cafe ^(over my table)
Cambridge, MA

"After changes upon changes,
we are more or less the same"
— Simon & Garfunkel, "The Boxer"
Live 1981, New York, New York

Welcome to the 19th anniversary
issue of The Cenacle, begun at a
place I've been frequenting since
I first moved to Boston in September
1992. That's 22 years ago. Wow.

Its interior has changed over
time some, no longer partitioned by a
wall. I still drink the diet soda though
it's doubled price since '92.

But its windows still look out to
the courtyard, my most beloved
place to sit, & Harvard Square all
around with its kooky mélange of
tourists, students, the rich, the homeless.

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Some years ago, I opened the pages of an anniversary Cenacle (Issue #61 / April 2007) with a letter to my dear friend, the poet Ric Amante, mentioning my half-janajal wish to return to metro Boston one day from the West Coast & be an old man around Harvard Square among the chess players & street poets.

Did so in 2010, & here in 2014 I sit in Harvard Square, players & freaks both in sight, & I am turning 50 in a few days. Old man? No, not yet. But not 28 like in '92, not 43 like in '07. A little closer year by year.

This will be my first birthday since both my parents have died. My father in 2008, & my mother, this past March 13. Each was old & sick by the end, such that sadness for their passing was mitigated by relief at the end to their sufferings.

Reaching back further into the Cenacle's history, to Issue #47 / December 2003, that number opened with a year-old letter to my mother, reporting to her my state of being out in Portland, Oregon, & concluding by asking her for

-3/-

more money while I continued to look for work. She sent another \$1000 or so, & said she had no more to give.

I find it funny that I chose to revive The Cénacle with that letter, to present December 2000 (again, a year late) by way of struggle & beggary. Walking the humble path, I suppose.

I credit her, & my grandmother, with setting me off on the path of books & art. She had an English B.A. from the University of Connecticut. My grandmother worked in a thrift store, & would read biographies all the time, & bring me books on her visits. I credit ~~her~~ being poor as a child, too. Books cost little compared to joining a school band, or playing sports, or even belonging to a church or temple.

Just past 10 years old & I'd been reading a book called Henry Reed, Inc. by Keith Robertson. Henry is 13 & keeps a journal of his summertime adventures trying to start a business by drilling for oil, hunting for truffles,

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I experimenting with weather balloons. I remember that ~~Henry~~ Henry makes a big deal about his being a journal, not a diary (diaries being for girls, by his recd).

Began May 4, 1974, my journal was my first writing project. Forty years later, 8 volumes so far, my journal is still a foundational project, how I launch into new days. When it's behind, I don't feel right. It's like my yoga. I didn't keep it very often for many years, early on, only becoming more devoted to it when I became more devoted to writing as a whole.

When I was out in Portland, those months in 2002-2003 during which I wrote to my mother, I didn't keep my journal at all. No journal, no Cenacle. When I limped back East, both projects revived & have gone fairly strong all the years since.

So, 50 years old, me; 40 years, my journal; & 19, The Cenacle. Sitting in

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this joint I've known 22 years. Newly
an orphan, as odd as this is to say.

"After changes upon changes,
we are more or less the same"

Is this true? Yes. No. The human
being shambles along, accumulating habit
& prejudice, a history, a perspective,
a sense of one's own skills & limitations.
The shine of one's gifts, the smell of one's
shit.

Cheese & chocolate delight me. Fine girlish
asses too. Rock music. Bare trees. Snowy
days. Drums, fire, dancing.

Political reactionaries make me sick.
Smiling religious fanatics. Most religious
ceremonies as a whole. Racists. Homophobes.
Drunken frat boys. Small, loud minds.

And all this for years & decades.
More or less the same.

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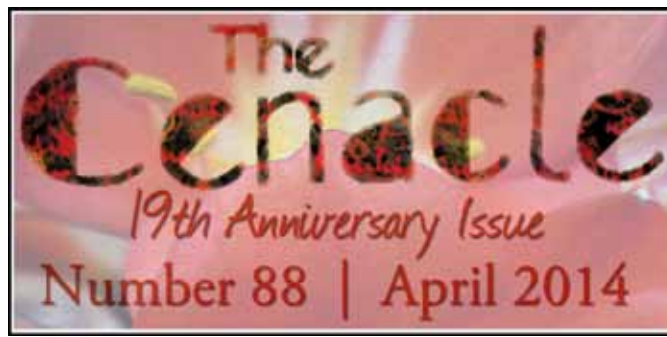
You too. Your list of loves & loathes.

So where is the new & the novel?
How to decide which moments are
the choicest to step off the path,
toss the map, venture into the dark
of the woods?

I can't answer this save to say
that similar hours in one's life
may or may not necessarily be
the same. I sit in this familiar
place, doing this familiar thing,
yet this moment is not the
same as any other moment I've
sat here. Km, yes, but no more.

It's this confusion of similar with
same that I believe can lead to
depression & despair. We are, perhaps
more or less, the same. A moveable
relation, runs the world through.

This more-or-less is the chance, the
golden lovely chance you & I & the world
share. It's a small something but this
is what I gift you, from 50 years of my being.
XX, 4-24-2014



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Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2014

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Thank you to Tom Furrier at Cambridge Typewriter, for restoring my beloved old machines to functionality.

This issue is dedicated with loving remembrance to my mother, Annette Soulard.



Annette Soulard
June 5, 1940 - March 13, 2014

Do not stand by my grave and weep
I am not there, I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow
I am the diamond glints on snow
I am the sunlight on ripened grain
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awake in the morning's hush
I am the swift upflying rush,
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft starlight at night,
Do not stand at my grave and cry
I am not there, I did not die.

Newington Memorial Funeral Home



Seasonal Affective Disorder

Just before dusk a wide flange of sky erupts
above the smokestacks of American Axle,
a diagonal shaft of plasma-colored sunlight
silently splitting the drab cloud cover
only to be swallowed whole by a leaden scroll
whose sliding gray cursives
don't so much spell out gloom
as artistically disperse it.
It's December again,
and the unwelcome beginning
of a long siege of sunlessness and introspection
wherein everything that wounds and vexes
will now jab harder and longer
yet still lack the force to break through.
And you'll try making room for this dour incursion
by giving more weight to what is right and beautiful
about your long and patchwork life,
but each afternoon grows more opaque than the last,
each night a lengthening estrangement.
Come morning you rise at dawn,
but the sun remains muffled, mythical, vacant
in this season of shutdown, crash, impairment.

* * *

Saint Someone

I once met a man in Seattle
whose fragile psychic network
ran his speech to shiver and quake.
At first I thought “DT’s”—
personal hieroglyphs between pints of white port—
but after walking much and saying very little,
then drinking anew and long on moon-splashed docks,
it became apparent the tremors
were broadcasts from other realities,
his red and ultramarine throat
incapable of further vocalization,
his perpetual blue eyes all god.

* * *

Young Apollo

He's the boy with the sun in his eyes,
the sure-footed stalker of the real
piloting a slant-six Dodge Dart
with an eight track a six-pack
an ice ax a red Bic a quick smile.
You've seen him downtown, upstate,
ecstatic, abject, profound, comic
in search of the raw and the cooked.
What strange and beautiful fires
tear through the skies when you're seventeen!
Flare through brain and cock,
fuse old beauty to green heart.
How does he hold such majesty,
and when does he plan to release it?

* * *



Memories of Stevens Pond

Male bluegills raise round gravel-beds
up from the pond's sand-ribbed bottom.

A nest of stones

in different

shapes hefts

lusters energies—

herded poked

nuzzled captured

in a rough and

lovely ring.

And then fierce ceremonial sweepings
of the perimeter, gold and silver
scales glittering, aquatic shimmying
of eyes, fins, and tails.

“O do swim into my homespun lair—
enter freely and gladly this open space
and we shall press close and true
amidst the swirls of life created.”

* * *

Less is More

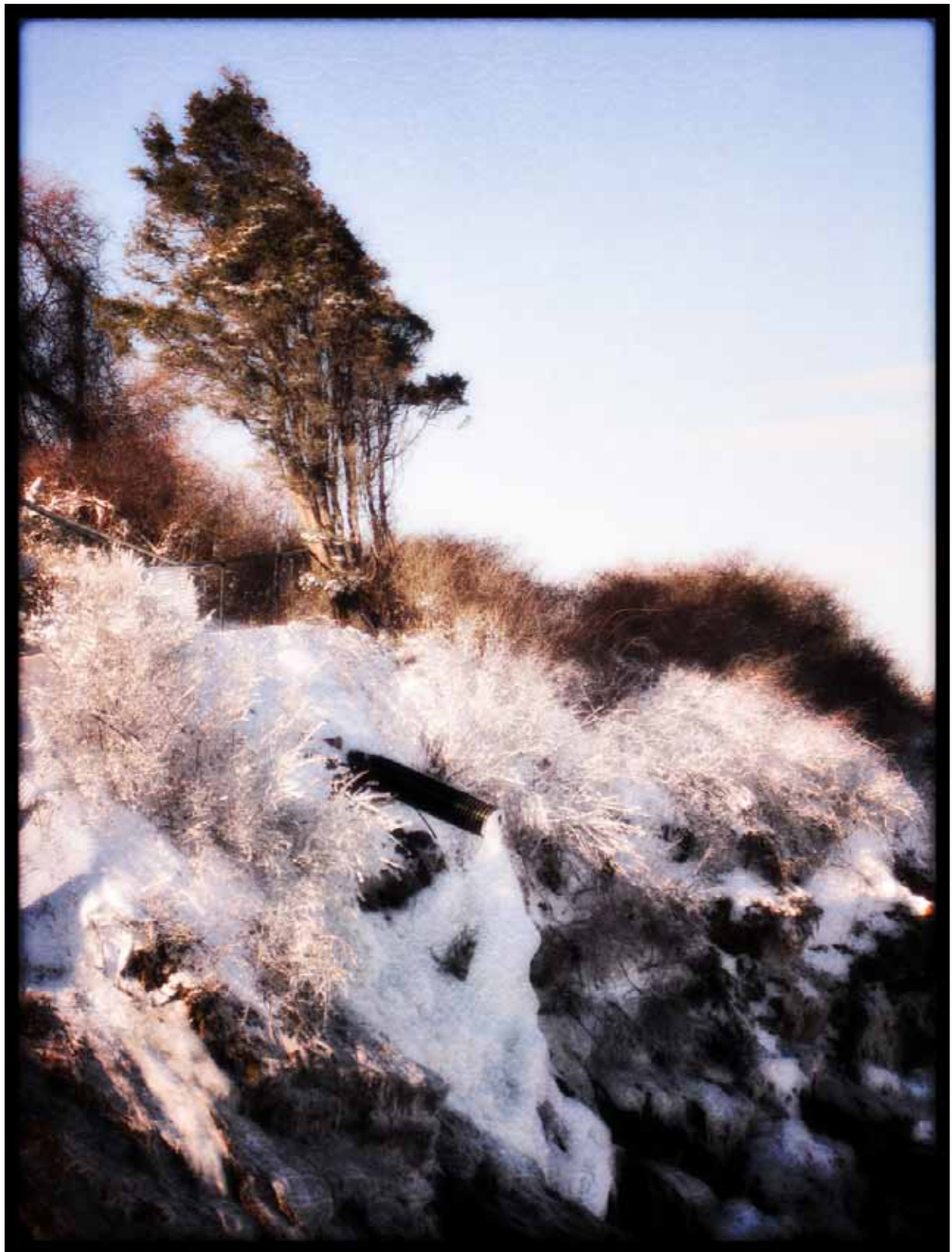
It's what you don't do,
it's who you're not,
it's when you go about it
and why you tend the light.
It's where you once lived,
it's how you let go,
it's all about what can't be known
hiding in plain and grateful sight.

* * *

January Thaw

Time feels kind and luxurious again
as the old dog walks you slowly down the street
and honeyed shafts of sunlight silently ignite
the damp mats of dark brown oak leaves
freshly uncovered of their snow-white linens
on a mid-day Monday stroll most folks away
just the alders and boulders and you
uncoiling in the hillside's warming filaments.
Branches unfreeze in a sheen of lemon filigree,
each stone brims with glacial amber,
the dog sniffs joy on every surface—
the earth would like to welcome you back.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

Dream Raps, Volume Three

I'm Listening to the Folk Singer

Well now, I step back into old years. Far gone years. And I'm listening to the folk singer on the phonograph, and he's there, sitting with me, and we're listening to one of his songs, a good one, we're talking. I'm telling him how I cried at news of his death, how much his music means to me, and then he says, *I'm going to travel with you for a while*, and we decide to go to a show, as seems logical, when you're traveling with an old folk singer.

And there's a long line, and I don't know who's playing. Who are we waiting to see? It's a good question, perhaps without an answer, and eventually we go to the show but I'm not so sure it's such a great show. The band doesn't seem very enthused. In fact, they only play a chord or two, and then just start to doze. They start to fall asleep right on stage, they drift away. And someone says, *hey man, wanna come to a party?* Sure, we say.

And we follow this guy out into his van, it has no roof, and it's pulled along the road by several horses. *Hi-ho, Gold!* he cries, not wanting to be like everyone else. We end up at a party, with lots of people, and someone's playing guitar again, to the tune of *Jingle Bell Rock*, the old Christmas tune. Someone is singing other words, and there is talk of a place called Hamilton Mill, in 1905, the whole town is excited about tooth tattoos. Everyone is excited, this is the big thing for all of them. Tooth tattoos. But then I cry out, *look out! Here comes television! here comes television! here comes television!*

That Mobile Home

When we went back, long and far and deep, it was to that mobile home. Now abandoned, this is where I came from. I lived there as a child. And everything's still here, it's as though we'd left without packing anything, or that we'd had so much stuff that we'd brought plenty and left lots behind.

And I'm walking through all of this decay, and I'm trying to figure it out, I'm trying to understand what was left behind, and why, and I find myself focusing on all the toys, little miniature figures, they seem to be Disney figurines, and there seem to be hundreds or maybe thousands of them. And I'm thinking to myself, *well, you know I'd like to take something from here, I'd really like to do that, I'd really like to have something that I take away from my coming here this time, and I can't find anything but Disney figurines.* Everything else is almost destroyed beyond form, and it's very peculiar and, well, I don't find anything.

I just don't find a thing, so I leave. And I walk out the door, and I walk for miles, and I come to a different kind of neighborhood, and there I walk into a large house, and I think it might be mine but I'm not really sure.

There's something about the curtains that are weird, they're red curtains, really, but there are green curtains over the red curtains, and I'm disturbed by this and I don't know why one set of curtains has covered the other set of curtains, and then I come into a room, maybe it's on the second floor or the third floor, and one of the curtains is gold and this is even stranger and so, really, what it comes down to is that when you wander in such a way, you don't return.

Down Below There's a Frozen Body of Water

This moment is culmination and cumulation, this moment is culmination and cumulation. It's spooky, though, I have to say. I'm on a hill with someone and, down below, there's a frozen body of water. And, uh, I find that I'm throwing rocks to crack the ice, and I look across the water and there are these strange crystalline formations, and I'm trying to break them too, throwing my rocks at them, their different colors, their strange and disturbing formations across the frozen water, and I seem to have a lot of rocks and I seem to be throwing them at the water and at the formations.

And I wake up in the room of a castle and there's this fly buzzing at the window. It's a small room, buzz is loud, small fly though, loud buzz, small room. I open up the window and I let the fly out. This castle seems like everything, but really the Island is everything, culmination and cumulation.

This Was a Science Test Like None Other

This was a science test like none other I'd ever taken, let me tell you. Well, I was studying for it by a river, that's how I prepared. Reading my books, looking at my notes, I was getting ready. And I thought, *OK, I'm ready to go*. Or maybe I didn't so much think that, but at some point, ready or not, there I was, taking this test.

The test was not on paper, however. The test was in a container of food, a plastic container of food, it was sort of a dry pudding. And I was reading the pudding as though it was a series of questions. I was poking my fingers into it, to find the questions and then answer them. And this may seem strange to you, it may seem very strange to you, it was probably strange to me too. But what had happened was, I woke with instructions for taking this test, and the instructions were: *forgive, understand, reconcile*. That was what this plastic container of pudding science test left.

It Begins With the Smallest of Kittens

It begins with the smallest of kittens, who wears a long blue top hat. Sometimes sleeps on a piece of cardboard. Sometimes rests on the very tips of my fingers. Well, sometimes that tiny kitten is not there, and so I will leave the room, and I will float through the hallway, riding in a white bucket. Sometimes I will see old faces, known from other times.

Float on and on, outside there is a field. And above this field are a million shooting stars. There are people picnicking beneath the shooting stars, having a party. I think to myself, *I've got to get more room for that tiny kitten*.

But, anyway, I have to go to work. And I work in a big store. I'm in the back, and I can't find my book bag. Not quite sure where it is, find myself walking back to the city, street after street. There's a record store owner sitting outside his store, and he shows me a map. Later there's a pizza place, empty, but for all the dancers inside. I can't find my bags. And I keep walking, buildings getting older and older, and finally I find myself sitting in an empty ballpark with an AM transistor radio, and I'm listening to the *Creature Common Show with DJ Squeak*.

Love Is . . .

I come to a bar, walk through the door, accompanied by a girl with a bottle for a leg. We sit down with two strangers. I start talking about what could strangers initially have in common before speaking. The lady laughs at me. I don't know if she enjoys my statement, I don't know if she doesn't. But she looks at me and she says, *love is violins, tributes, and ghosts*. She continues on, saying that all through her day walking here she'd seen it scrawled everywhere, and she had joined in, and she brandishes a strange crayon before our eyes.



We turn, for the night's entertainment is about to begin at this bar and, at the podium, which is behind the bar, high up where all can see, there is a lecturer. The lecturer speaks of spirituality, goes on and on, and concludes that Christianity is the only way. I had admired his speakings, known him previously, but now I start to shout other religion's names, *Zoroastrianism! Jainism! Buddhism! ismism!* I shout and shout and the place engulfs in riots.

A Shifting Design

In a car, with other documentary film producers. We work for the same network. We're driving down a very narrow street, with a crowd of cars, and then a crowd of people. My friend somehow manages to get the car turned around, steers us through. It's like we're driving backwards through the crowd of cars, crowd of people.

What happens next is that we arrive where we were going all along. It's a place, oh I don't know about this kind of place, you might say it's, uh, a kind of place where you don't arrive to too often, and you certainly never get there unless someone brings you there. And there's a back room, and I see professors from my old college. They taught about books but, you see, I never took their classes. I took the classes of others. And here we are, and they are glad to see me. I seem to be passing through, passing on, and passing elsewhere.

And, well, they have a little present for me. Takes a little bit of preparation but what they do is, they take a box of very small cigars, probably as big as your pinky, maybe half your pinky, and they soak them in liquid, and then freeze them in ice cream.

And then there's this time that passes. I'm with my brother, carrying the box of frozen liquid-covered cigars. Walking along, but he seems to be limping, his sneakers crushed. And I look over, and there's a building, and it's crushed in the same way, the same formation, crushed.

And we are crossing the street and I'm thinking, *I've got to get him a better sneaker, or two even.* And he looks at me and says, *beauty is guerilla.* And I said, *how did you remember that old phrase,* and he nods, and a wink, and we move on.

Darling Darlene Danger

It's a story of Darling Darlene Danger. And she recounts it in her book, *Luminous Ends*. It is the story of her parents who came to the castle when she was small, and found her among other denizens, and took care of her some years till they no longer got along, and they lived in different areas of the castle. They would only speak by telephone.

One night, while arguing on the telephone, the wife is smoking a cigarette, puts it down on the bedspread. It causes a fire, which burns a hole in the castle. Eventually, Darling Darlene

Danger's parents leave. They leave the castle, they leave her, but she stays. She is part of the castle and she will not leave now or ever. She keeps herself busy with elaborate paperwork she does not understand. Sometimes she gets trapped in it, deep in it. There are questions in this paperwork that are multiple choice. She doesn't know the answers. She struggles.

Once, she puts on the radio and listens to a program about the Big Red Machine, was a ball team, long ago, somewhere else. They won their games, many games and many more games. It was so easy. Darling Darlene Danger slips into a dream in which she goes to their park. There, then, she sees the old fire pit container they used. There are still scraps of paper around, predictions written on them. These, and other things, she recounts in her book, *Luminous Ends*.

Running

Running, running, running, running, running, *running*. In a complex, I don't know how I got there, here, *there*, *here*. It's like a strange funhouse, with many strange rooms, and I'm running, running, running, running, *running*, and I seem to be with someone but I'm not sure who. I find my favorite automobile in a strange form and drive her badly into another room, and somehow lose her along the way, and I keep running, running, running, running, running, *running*.

There are minor barriers, there are twists and turns, and I keep trying to get back but the rooms shift and change. Eventually I come back to my favorite automobile, together with a man who is Afghani. We sit there, he says he doesn't want anybody to know that he is an Afghani. He shows me the parts of his body where he was beaten up, and then we get out of the automobile and he shows me the place where he was beaten up. It is a memorial area to where he was beaten up. And then we see two men with skis trying to steal my favorite automobile, and I chase them away violently.

And I go back into the complex and run and run and run, running and running and running and running and, for just a moment I have a pencil and there's a great book and I've got to get it all down, finally, all of this, every last part, every last detail about the running and running and running, and I'm writing it down in the great book but the pencil tip is wearing down on me.

There is a Festival

There is a festival, always there seems to be a festival, I mean that just seems to be how these things go. And once again, I'm trying to sort through the matter of this festival. For a while, driving a favorite automobile, superb in many ways. In the rearview mirror, all the male cast members of the TV show I once called home are singing and dancing me goodbye. Happy,

jumping, wishing me well. I am moving on from that TV show. They know I have to go to the festival.

Later on, I'm helping someone put up a platform for a Grand Production, and there's a question of what act to lead off with first. I say, *always lead with your best punch*. Eventually, I come to the wooded area of the festival. Oh, I suppose you could say it's even more than wooded, far more than wooded. It is a great forest, the world's forest.

For I know that no festival would be the smashing success it could be unless someone goes to see the Summonatrix and gets an approving word for all of it, and that's why I'm driving my favorite automobile into the deep woods, bound for seeing the Summonatrix, *ah ah ah, oh oh oh, wish me well*.

I Was On My Own for the Weekend

Well, there was that one time, you see, that I was on my own for a weekend, and I was living in this apartment and I had this friend, and he published a book and he was most excited, most, most, *most* excited. And uh, it got reviewed in *The New York Times* and his chance to change careers. He was a cleaner of grit, grime, and grease. Slammed by that review and, well, he still cleans the old grit, grime, and grease, and maybe he's happier for it.

But I have to say that he held up well, hosted this party one time and, at the heart of the party, he gathered everybody around, there was lots of smoke, there was lots of frivolity, windows were flung wide open, moon in every window and he had this contest, see, because he was gathering himself back and getting back his mojo, *fuck The New York Times*, he said, and there was this contest where he gathered everybody together to participate and there was a long piece of paper and there was a puzzle on each side of it and he handed it off to groups and what happened was you had to make your way down the puzzle on the one side and then make your way down the puzzle on the other and you had to do it quickly, you had 30 minutes or less, this was not a slow going puzzle so there were people explaining it, it seemed like there was more than just my roommate who was into this.

And it got toward dawn so we walked outside and there were picnic tables outside and we were still working on the puzzle, somewhere along the way the half hour had come and gone but we were still working on it anyway, and then it started icy raining and I got worried because I had valuable things with me, valuable friends not accustomed to rain, and a bag full of notebooks that would have gotten wet.

In the rain there appeared this German Shepherd barking and I didn't know whose it was, *who's this German Shepherd belong to? why's he here?* Finally his man came along, see this is the end of the story, and he said, *how was he?*, and we said, *he was good, he sat still and he waited and it was good, it was all good, your German shepherd was a good dog. Thank you.*



Yesterday is Everything

You know, yesterday is everything and there's almost nothing useful to say about any of it. I'm in an old city in just shorts, looking for coins to make a phone call, call this old friend, call that old friend, yesterday, yesterday, *yesterday*.

And I find myself in a situation in the outskirts with a couple of others, it's snowing, there's cops around. There's a guy in a truck and he's minding his own business but several of us have piled a bunch of snow in his cab, no reason, we're trying to fool the cops, *what does that mean*, then we're driving with him, sitting with the snow, *what does that mean*, and we end up on another planet.

There's a mining area and we intend to sabotage it, but this gets out of hand and it's pointless. There are men, there are machines, there are girls in bikinis surrounding us, every which way, we're trapped by them all. They knew we were coming and here we all are. Now we're in a cage, the cage is moving, it's on wheels and, don't you know it, in the middle of all this I meet a hippie and he just wants to go to sleep, what else would be true?

My buddies Tim and Rick, the ones I've been traveling through this time and place, I've confused them, I don't know which one is which, I don't know who is who, I'm uncertain, it rattles my bones not to know, not to know which is which and who is who, it makes me think, *I just don't know many things, but the whole of us are going to escape somehow*.

We're sent out to work like prison gangs on this planet, wherever it may be, but what we know, and what you just have to trust is going to occur, is that two gangs of us will go out but only one gang of us will return.

A Panoply of Events & Occurrences

Sometimes it's just a panoply of events and occurrences. For example, I'm with a loveable sheriff. He's glad pot is legal in our state. And it gets complicated from there. There are guns, a dog gets shot, it's always my dog that gets shot. The sheriff nods, commiserates.

Further event occurs, there's a ship and someone is rowing away. I'm with a child in a store getting matches and candy for him. I shift from person to person in the store, not always taking over, just eluding, and finally I am chained and bound and surrounded by cops and the sheriff is not amongst them. These are mean cops.

But I have already requested a bike, and I manage to elude them, and ride away into the darkness down the road. I see that the friendly sheriff is descending from above without a parachute and I wonder *how are you doing that?*

And anyway, it's good that pot is legal in our state. For you see, what happens next is that there is a brick wall, right in the middle of the road. I come up to the brick wall, and I discover it

is a brick wall through time, and there is a TV show about the brick wall and people in the show who also watch along the brick wall, they travel along the brick wall through time. It all makes sense, so I begin to ride my bike along the brick wall through time, wondering if my sheriff friend will catch up with me, perhaps he will, he makes an good traveling companion, he knows several excellent jokes.

Eventually, even being a time traveler, I have to get work, so I'm working at a small deli, a convenience store in a kind of camp compound. The deli is in a small house. At one point there's a long, long line for sandwiches. The first one, he's a customer I know by name, asks for seltzer, I point him to the sodas and drinks and cans. I don't think he paid because there's nobody at the register. The next one wants an elaborate sandwich, has had made it before, she knows what breads we carry. She wants the most obscure of these breads, but in her mind and in her heart is more than sandwiches. She is planning revenge against her ex-boyfriend. It goes on and on, this long line of customers with all their tales and stories.

Then I leave and I go away, I'm tired of this brick wall, I'm tired of this deli, I'm tired of the whole thing, I don't even miss my sheriff friend anymore. As I'm leaving, I come to the lady planning revenge and I say, *you know before I go and leave all, I'll tell you it's not worth it, you won't win him back anyhow. Think twice.*

When I Was Young I Roamed the Woods

When I was young, I roamed the hills, countryside, the woods, the far, deep woods, and I lived in a cabin with few modern conveniences of any kind. I lived there with a woman I didn't know well. She'd moved in at some unknown point and when I'd come home from my roamings, she liked to pin me against the wall and have me fuck her with my jeans half down, just like that, lickety split, and then I'd be sweaty and stained as I pulled them up afterward. There was nothing romantic about it at all. Eventually, I packed up what little I owned, I took down the cabin, which wasn't much anyway, returned its components to what they would be otherwise, back to the earth, and got me back down to some so-called civilization.

Found old friends who'd wondered where I'd gone, but not that hard. Found them planning something, which they mixed me up in, at least for a while. We were going to rob a bank. One morning found us crouched with guns on steps waiting for the bank to open, and I thought to myself, *is this what I came back for?* as I held my gun. I'd never even shot a gun in the wilderness all the time I'd lived there. I'd lived peaceably with the land and found my way. Finally, I just said *no, this is not for me.* Put my gun, heavy in my hands, down on the steps, now light in my hands. I told them I was leaving. They seemed scared to do so as well, scared of the man who'd hired us, a heavy criminal who wasn't there.

Somewhere along the way, I found myself a bicycle. I got on my bicycle and rode away. It was raining, hard, but I didn't care, didn't care at all. I decided I would ride to my mother's house and try to explain everything. Along the way I stopped at a McDonald's, great cheeseburgers

but I couldn't stay. I was terrified to be caught and dragged back to the criminal act I'd failed to perform, so I just kept biking and I guess that's all I wanted to say at this time.

A Tale of the W.A.R.P. Wizard

Now you probably want to hear another one of those splendid tales of the W.A.R.P. Wizard. You know him well. He travels with his small chunky book and snub-nosed raygun, helping, travels the four corners of the globe.

Well, this time around, he finds himself in time and space in an apartment in 1970 with others. They're gathered round expectantly and in walk the members of the greatest rock band that has ever existed. And their new album is just out and everyone's excited to sit in a room, the room we're in, there's chairs and pillows and couches and we're just all so excited.

It's all friendly but it's not very enthused and we begin to feel their lack of enthusiasm, we begin to feel the room dry up with the energy that was crackling through it, the excitement of meeting these musician heroes, these avatars, these brilliant geniuses who we love and admire so much, and here they are before us and nothing, *nothing*, they're just not happy to be here.

And I want to take a picture but my camera isn't working right, the batteries are dead or something like that. I go outside and try to find some more batteries or some kind of charger that you know will work in 1970, and just come back in and hardly anybody's left and people look at me in particular and they realize, *oh he's from the future*, and I think *ah, well, the jig's up, the energy is gone from the room*, the W.A.R.P. Wizard is being stared at darkly. *It's time*.

Trying Not to Crush the Thing

I keep falling asleep, waking up, trying not to crush the thing, trying very hard not to crush the thing. Where is it, trying not to crush the thing. And then I wake up, I do wake up and I realize, *oh, this place*. Overly familiar and not very clean, it's a prison camp. I've been here a short time, guarded by aliens in great armor. I don't know how big they are, I just know how big their armor is.

But we can walk around, us prisoners, because they're so much bigger and they're armed and it seems there's no way out, nowhere to go. Then one dies, and nobody seems to notice, he falls at my feet with a crash and nobody seems to notice.

OK. I'll go with this as long as it lasts. I pull open his armor, pull him out, he's not so big, and he's dead. I get in, knowing this won't work, knowing because I've observed that the armor only works based on blood recognition, as you slide in and it snaps into place, your finger gets pricked for blood recognition. As I slide in to place and my finger gets pricked, I'm sure

it's over. But, what the hell? Then something surprising happens. The armor is active and I'm inside. Someone comes up to me and I realize it's the dead alien's brother and he's happy to see me, and he embraces me, such as two big, armored aliens can embrace, and we head off to the ship.

They Call Me Makon

Well, now. They call me Makon, which is short for Makonic. I have my obsessions. For one thing, I think that my deep brown skin is lovely. I think it's gorgeous. I don't say a thing to anybody at all about this, ever. But it is a secret obsession of mine. So I don't tell anybody.

By day, I teach in the classroom. By night, I stay in my art studio. It has a single, tall window, looking out to the night. I make all kinds of art. I haven't ever decided what kind of artist I am. I decide to be a superhero of artists, and make all kinds, and discriminate against none. Make great canvasses and small sculptures of clay, of steel, things that are half melted, things that float in the sky. For a while I become obsessed, aside from with my skin, to making art that is half in and half out of my dreams. I like to watch it shift in the air. Sometimes I'll puff a little breath onto one, just to see it come and go and how it changes. It is such a good life, though I don't get much rest.

It's a Movie Theater, I Think

It's a movie theater, I think. Yes, I suppose it's a movie theater. And there's a movie that only a few want to see. Just a few of them, but they're being refused. They're scattered up and down the hallway that runs from theater to theater inside the large theater building. And they want to see this movie, and it's a few of them, but they're scattered. They are herded to a waiting area. And there still seems to be a lot of trouble about them seeing this movie, this strange few of them who've been herded.

But eventually they get in, and the movie starts, and somewhere along the way, there's a farm. Fields full of sleeping camels, curled around their eggs, and I'm trying to navigate through the camels and their eggs without waking anybody, just get to the other side. *How did I end up in this movie?* I don't know, but there I am. I find myself at the road that I was trying to get to, traveling with a lot of stuff and it's raining hard. I'm waiting for a bus, and I realize I've forgotten my tent bag, the kind that you hook over your shoulder. Left it back at that farm. I'm far from home. I have to get this bus, though I know that it is rare in coming.

I'm Living in One of Those Inside-Outside Apartments

You know, this happens every time I'm living in one of those inside-outside apartments. They get very cluttered. I try to pick them up, I do my best, what can I say? Several people appear, they seem to be friends. They have a shopping cart. They're asking me for help, to open my inside-outside apartment, roll their shopping cart on in. I try to help, I try to get them going.

Next door, a girl plays an elaborate game. I'd seen her, earlier in the evening, down in the street, with a circle of empty chairs, playing this elaborate game. Time to go outside of the inside-outside apartment, just time to leave it entirely, conceptually speaking.

Hey, oh, there you are, I was wondering where you were. Let's go walking together. Yes, it is a beautiful night, isn't it? Yes, I think it is too. How are you today? I'm fine, how are you?

What? Hark! Look at this alley we are walking down, what strange small stores on either side. You are annoyed that they sell magazines? Why are you annoyed by this thing? I don't know, Look, isn't it strange, this alley into a room? Oh, it's one of those inside-outside apartments that you arrive in. Yes, I have one of these too, aren't they nice? People just drop on in all the time, invited or not. Yes, indeed. It's good to see you. Well, must be going now, probably gotta get back to my own inside-outside apartment and figure out who's walked into it lately. So long.

It's Like Several Dreams at Once

You're wondering and, yes, it's like several dreams in one, and I'll tell you, there was one. Check this out. My first love, old and matronly, and there she was, a widow. And I come to her front steps. I don't triumph and I don't know why. Suddenly, I told you it was several dreams at once, I'm back at the burning festival in the desert, as though I never left, ecstatic, high, no time, no place, no where, here, forever. 'Tis sweet, 'tis fine. I look, peer, there's a house. I'm in that house. What? Huh? I told you, it was several dreams at once. And there are two people who've come to rob us. And I fight them off, they're not going to get the wad of money in my hands.

And they leave, but thennnn, he came back, and I decided to work with him. And she came back too, and I figured OK, why not? And they had this little foam radio, a tinny, crazy, noise in it. I look and look, and everywhere was crazy colors. I gave them some money from my wad to help, but we were going after a lot more.

You have to understand, *it was several dreams at once*. Living at this apartment, returning from somewhere, I had problems, I'm unsteady, several dreams at once. Some friends helped me out, picked things up, then they'd go. Then there's older women, they like me. I'm there with my love trying to figure out what to do, bills to pay, rent is late. I get out a check and an envelope and then sat filling it out. Get upset. Finally I leave, barefoot, wander out in the street. (Several dreams at once.) Should I write Sally on the envelope?



I don't know. I fall to the earth, to the grass, look up at the stars. And I think the following thought: *there's a lizard in a tank of water, big and fierce, threatening. But it is cold and begins to shrink, losing size and power, the ability to affect. I watch and watch, as now it is in a plastic bag with water, small, impotent. Its location no longer crucial, and it dies, tiny, glass-eyed.* It was several dreams at once, and I told you so.

You See, I'm Working at This Bookstore

Well, now, this doesn't happen every day of the week. You see, I'm working at this bookstore, as I have often done before. And there is this kid who has a book on Vietnam he's been looking at. And he wants to put it back on the shelf. I try to help him, but he tries to put it wherever. Gets impatient, but I school him in the process, give him the secrets of how you put books on shelves in bookstores. I'm not sure he appreciates it now but, sometime down the road, he'll be glad he was schooled on how to do it.

On my lunch break, which is ten minutes, I step outside, take a look around. *Oh, yeah. That pet store window.* There's a snake behind the glass. Predators keep coming toward it, it's newborn, and keeps eluding them. It seems almost hopeless, that this snake is going to get eaten or carried away, but somehow it's not, and I think to myself, *does this happen every time I take my ten minute lunch break out here, and look in this window?* Oh, probably. I think I need a better job. I need one of those office jobs, with a boss. The kind that you meet in an elevator and he has one of those voice recorders that he's always speaking his ideas into, because he's a go-getter. And he says to me, *you should be more like me, be a go-getter, read the best-selling novels, keep fit.* I say, *yeah right, man. You're not very fit at all. You're like 600 pounds, man, and you smoke cigars. What is fit about you?* And he says, *don't give me any lip. You're not going to advance in that way. The way you're going to advance is by making the boss feel good and obeying his every whim. Now light my cigar.*

Well, I don't like that, I don't like lighting guys' cigars, especially in elevators. It seems like a counter-productive thing to do, no matter what the corporate ladder might say about it. So I leave at the next floor that we come to. I just walk out. I'm done with these jobs. I'm going outside. It's cold, admittedly, but I'm going outside.

And I walk for a while, and there's snow. Everything's frozen. And I come across a vehicle and it's half-buried in the snow, and it looks like someone might need help. I think to myself, *well, what can I do?* and then I come up with it.

I turn to the group of people standing there, looking at the situation, gawkingly, and I say, *get some gasoline. Come on, there must be a can of gasoline amongst you.* They procure one and hand it to me. I pour a gasoline path from the road to the stuck vehicle. Set it on fire, and at least in this moment, at this time, it works. The car is out, thawed. It comes back to the road, it continues along its way.

Hooray! I have found my purpose in life, to roam the land, saving people with cans of gasoline and other fine tools and implements.

Through the Entrance to the Mall

Through the entrance to the mall, there is a door, and through the door there seems to be a vast residence, where lives a man and his two children. They are German, I think. There's a certain game going on in this complex, sort of a chase or hide-and-seek, constantly going on in this place. I await explanation, watching the people chase in and out of rooms, preparing for dinner, looking at a book on the fall of Vietnam in 1976. I notice a monitor showing a live feed from 1968 of crowds, fire, and chaos.

At one point, I'm with the German children and they fear I will leave. I say, *no, I'm here awhile*. I continue to watch the live feed from 1968. And I walk into the next room, and I find myself outside. How did that happen? It seemed like a room when I walked in, but no, I'm outside.

There are woods and there's a tiger. I run. My lover runs. What's she doing here? We find our sedan, better to run when you're riding. There are more animals, there are dogs and a cabin. We get them going, get them out, get them running. *Run, all of you, run, run, run*. We get them all running, and look back twice to make sure that there are no stragglers.

I Was An Agent

I was an agent. You can say, *are you still an agent?* and I'll probably just grimace, but anyway, I saved this girl from being murdered like her parents had been. Saved her, it was ugly, but she was saved, she wasn't murdered, and that was that. I moved on.

Then, years later, I'm sitting somewhere, uncomfortable, at an outdoor café. And I'm waiting for someone who isn't coming, and I knew that this person wasn't coming, but I was sitting there anyway, letting go of the idea slowly, when this girl, much older, of course, than when I saved her from being murdered like her parents had been, suddenly was sitting at my table and smiling at me as though I was still the much taller man I had been when I saved her.

It Was Christmastime, 1970-something

It was Christmastime, 1970-something. Oh you remember those years where it was either one year, or another, but frankly no one was quite sure. It was hard to care.

But there were these people who cared, maybe they cared a little bit too much because what they would do is they would infiltrate weapons facilities and they would steal the nuclear weapons kept there. They'd drive them out to the wastelands, way out somewhere, it's hard to say where, but they drove these weapons out and they dismantled them. And things went fine for a long, long time. Stealing the weapons, dismantling them, out in the wastelands, but they'd come to this Christmas, 1970-something, and they'd been doing this for a while. And when they unloaded their truck, the latest batch of weapons they'd stolen to dismantle, they found a man, additionally.

He was dressed in a red suit, he had a long white beard, a little tasseled hat, kind of chubby, he was sound asleep among the nuclear weapons. Seemed like he might be sleeping one off, too. So these people looked at one another and said, *holy shit. It's Christmas. We've got to dismantle Santa Claus, too.*



* * * * *





Judih Haggai

ku slips in
leaves a sigh
and that's it

* * *

son trapped
in plastic cast
how long the night

* * *

awake at two
me and the lawn sprinklers
decorate the night

* * *

very early
slides into almost late
isn't time strange?

* * *

all chances
arrive on schedule
if i notice

* * *

words resonate
added bass and percussion
who can sleep?

* * *

camels in the field
long time residents
pay no mind

* * *

back to green fields
chamomile welcome
me and my bike

* * *

alas the frog departs
no more pond frolic
back to work

* * *

out of work
mindfulness teacher
sits and breathes

* * *

another milestone
a fast kiss
as we part

* * *

my mind
a small crumb
in the world loaf

* * * * *



*Joe Ciccone*

All I Can Say

Prologue

I write because the past keeps happening.
Day after day I settle old scores,
forget old lines,
remember new ones.
The memory of a poet
is persistent.

i.

Before this house, some trees.
Before the trees, just ground.
Before the ground, a house.
One must have religion.

ii.

My cellar is a church.
Within the church is a doorframe,
Beside the frame, a door
leaning against the wall.
Light shines from beneath the door
but not the frame,
at night.

iii.

I dream of my father.
 He looks at me.
 We are the same age by now.
 He tries to speak but can't.
 I try to speak but cry.
 It goes on like this for awhile.
 I am trying not to wake up.
 Then he motions with his index finger
 as if to say someday, Joe,
 someday.

iv.

My surprising course
 was built of will,
 unlikely as are these hands,
 built for working wrenches,
 not the guitar—
 for working steel,
 not flesh.

v.

A star goes out
 on the other side of the world.
 "Telstar" plays in a dusky field.

I ask the sky, "Perfect order
 or perfect chaos?"

Sighs the setting sun,
 "Ask my brother the moon,
 on his moonlit run."

vi.

You exist between these words,
 some chosen, some there before us.
 I've moved mountains,
 spoon by spoon.
 Words—not so much.

vii.

What'll you do when your time comes—
 When all your checkpoints fail?
 When even paper won't burn?

viii.

I walked through a series of rites,
 labored in a bubble.
 I begged to make it real
 but the asterisks remain.

* * * * *



Paleo Redemption

[Travel Journal]

1 – Death

I was languishing lonely in an Idaho wilderness shack. The vast natural beauty surrounding me was stifling suffocation. My only companions in this hovel was a hoard of flies. 37% of my daily life was spent trying to kill them. Myopically, I'd flail fairly efficiently, sneaking up slowly, dashing with determination, obliterating a handsome 80%. This left only three to five thousand of them to keep me company while they fed on the mashed slime of their brethren.

My mother died with a grimace as I leaned over her. Then, a short time later, my father expired. With a gurgle and some flailing hand signals I did not understand, his eyes bugged out and he collapsed dead onto the pillows. My two best friends rode the white pony from the golden triangle over to the Grim Reaper's territory within the next year. My wife figured it was less paperwork than a divorce to become a cancerous skeleton. She had the presence of mind, though, to fix it with the lawyer so that I was left with nothing but the dog. I got a new girlfriend while I silently grieved, but she moved out after a few years over some imagined moral indignity. Maybe it was the necrophilia Internet site. All that I had left in the world that loved me were the animals, and the cats were questionable. Over the course of the spring and summer, the coyotes ate the hapless felines in succession. Growing bolder, the dog was mugged and killed in front of me. Dashing to the carnage, I flung my self into the wild creatures, screaming, flailing, and wailing in a white blur of gnashing teeth. But to no avail. The blood of bodies ran as my river of tears. Everyone died and left me morosely alone.

I left all the dog hair in the bed to remember my best friend by. The stuff eventually stuck all over me as I became more and more unwashed, uncaring, uncombed. My emails to distant acquaintances—euphemistically thought of as “friends”—became increasingly self pitying, psychotic, at times pneumatic. Rarely was there a cyber reply. A spoken word was not heard for a month at a time. The exception being the Wal-Mart cashier ringing up my Arkansas chickens. Eating these hormonal monstrosities was my only comfort.

But to a simple cashier question—“Oh. Barbequing tonight?”—I could only grunt and make sniffing noises. My mind churned with baking temperatures, the cranberry sauce I forgot, about when the insane eat this poultry raw. I could not talk. I had forgotten how. My eyes were shifty and furtive like the cornered crazy. I stumbled when I walked, unable to connect my legs with my brain neurons. My clothes were unchanged, becoming dirty and raggedy. I was a slimy, stinking slob, slithering below society's most basic requirements.

In my hovel home, on the couch still covered in hair, I would fondle the Chinese assault rifle which was fully loaded, gazing longingly down the barrel to the relief I knew was there. The corridor to my friends and loved ones. A final end to this life of solitary confinement. A

rational reasoning to solve my condition.

Another day. The weeks are rolling away rapidly unnoticed. There are horrible smells in the shack that I dimly recognize as myself. Another chicken is cooking and the rifle barrel is making little circular divots on my temple as I try out different positions. Wouldn't want to fuck this up and be a drooling veggie job for the next thirty years. But not yet. Not yet, I think. Have to wait for the chicken to be done. Can't be stupid and burn the place down. But then . . . why the hell not? Hmmm . . . this is a pretty comfortable position, the barrel under my chin, the breech in my crotch like the giant dick of death.

But my tiny friends are buzzing my nose, crawling on my legs. This epithelial annoyance fucks up the necessary dark trance mood. I have to move the weapon, grab the swatter, and whack the crawling bastard on my leg. The self-flagellation stings a little and knocks me right out of my sad sack sorry situation. I gotta wait for the insect rage to subside and start all the hell over again with the depression. At this rate I'll go crazy. I'll resume my death deliberations after the chicken comes out of the oven. Hmm . . . an hour away. Might as well read the Viagra spam email while I wait.

There—nestled between “MoMore Problems for Penny” and “CeepeepVag.rag.ula,”—and just below “Wendy Wants Wood,” there is a golden subject line: “Digging Dinos in Mormon Country.”

2 – Outside

An email from my sister's kid Dan, the Denver museum curator. I doubt this is an eight-month delayed thank you letter for the Christmas present, nor another request for firecracker information. Although I still think he's 12, he's more like 40 now and his wife wouldn't let him play with that stuff. Damn, real mail—from a human. I wanna frame it even before I open it.

The nephew Dan is apologetic that he hasn't written me earlier. I don't recall that he's ever written me at all. But he kindly invites me to join him and other paleontologists in the search for dinosaur bones in southern Utah. My sister will be driving, as she has been joining the expeditions for a few years as a volunteer, cook, and source of moral support. I can ride with her, he says. But first I must fill out a volunteer form for the Museum. No big deal, I'm assured. Grand. I can do this. I can get out of here. Away from the chicken and assault rifle. Some salvation looms dimly on the horizon.

I write my sister Lauri, who connects me to the form. She is so welcoming, telling me to hurry to her home in Colorado where we'll launch together to the bone fields. We have so much to talk about. This is so weird. I thought we hated each other. We must have forgotten our sibling angst somewhere in the sands of time—and that's all fine with me. A warm fuzzy feeling washes over me, as though dipped in bath water. A bubble-bath. There is still someone on this planet who cares a rat's ass that I exist besides the bank nagging me about credit card fraud.

I fill out the volunteer form and email it to Cathy, the museum gatekeeper, busybody, Miss Efficiency Extraordinaire. A prompt reply informs me that this is the wrong form. I must fill out the attached BS311-9. Fill out the BS311-9 and fire it back. Efficiently received, she replies, but I must be screened through a background check. Panicked, I type to Laur, (which name she hates). “What's this all about? Why the social screening? What type of crimes will exclude me?” My mind shuffles through a list of crimes I have committed. Which ones were

recorded and which did I escape wholesale?

She doesn't answer, but instead forwards it to her other son, also a Museum paleontologist named Dave. Dave writes back: "You have nothing to worry about, Uncle Charlie. This is just to keep out the murderers, the bank robbers, and the molesters. Strictly a routine check." I hate tests. *I flunk tests*. I have committed the first two crimes and possibly the third if you count the injured owl. I confess to Dave about the owl—it was dying anyway after doing a face plant on my truck grill. I hadn't had a girlfriend in a year and my necrophilia was acting up. Dave replies suddenly again:

"Dear Uncle Charlie: Ornithological buggery is not a crime in Utah, but you may want to curb your fascination with road kills while riding with Mom. She has an OCD problem with stains in her SUV, random feathers and fur clumps being right up there on the list. Besides, the computers at the Museum use the same program for screening that got Pee Wee Herman hired. So despite your colorful history, I don't think you'll have any problem. We welcome you back into the family. Please stay away from Mom's lap dog."

Now I sweat for four days. Will the hyper-efficient Cathy dig into the international database, including what happened in Canada and Belize, or will this be like Sara Palin's presidential vetting? On the fourth day, I get an email from Cathy:

"Congratulations: Charlie: you have passed the background check. I assume you'll be riding with your sister Lauri and meet up with us on the 30th where Dave will join us on the 31st and return to the field on the 1st with Dan who will be back on the 2nd to travel on the 31st back to the main camp in the gathering of volunteers on the 30th. See you out there!" I have no idea what the fuck she's talking about. I'm just going to limp my clunker truck to Colorado, throw my shit into the sister's SUV. Then see what happens. I wonder how hairy and soft their dog is?

It occurs to me to do a reality examination on myself before I hit the outside world. I arrange to meet a quasi-ugly lady through an Internet dating site. She is just in the nearby western village, probably another covered wagon descendant. Selecting my finest clothes from the pile in the corner, there is a small clatter as the dried mouse turds sprinkle to the floor. These designer duds have a few glue splotches and oil stains. This should lend artistic chic to my ensemble. I have to coax the shirt from under the couch where it has crawled with its own biologic power. A good sniff test to my selection and I'm ready. This is equivalent to a dog in an onion factory trying to find a cucumber. It is obvious to me that my DayGlo green shoelaces will carry the day with appropriate fashion.

My date shows late at the cafe. I meet her outside because I'm already leaving with a hangdog rejection problem. She is actually a handsome lass, a western wear model sort in a sleeveless blouse that has pearl snaps holding the beef-fed bosoms in. She's all cleaned and ironed, but her face is sun wrinkled like an Anasazi Indian. The wrinkles are all tightened up into a double spiral, and I see that she has a look of horror. Glancing behind me there is no apparent demon threat there. Odd. Her midnight red lips begin to speak.

"I must have this date confused with my parolee volunteer program." Clever and direct, I think. Continuing her analysis: "Your hair is standing straight up. What's your hair gel? Rat turd mousse?"

Maybe. What is it? Rat or moose?

"When was the last time you shaved? Going for the Don Johnson look? Your shirt appears so suffocated with grime it could chase a Petri Dish outta the lab. If life is good to me,



I'll never see your underwear."

Well . . . OK. I was wondering why my clothes were sticking to me. "But the shoelaces are pretty cool. Doncha think?" I stammer.

"Bah! Humph!" She utters. "I'll let you buy me a bean sprout and goat cheese sandwich at this non-corporate sustainable cafe. Then I'm late for my Buddhist yoga class."

I'm wondering if the goat cheese will mask my olfactory splendor. I'd like her to get a full whiff of my manliness; the pheromone storm rising from my shorts must be irresistible. Twenty-two dollars and some icy conversation later, she disappears in a Subaru covered in politically correct stickers. *Give Peace a Chance. Obama '08. Save Endangered Species.*

What the hell—that's what I am. *Endangered.* Limping my crashed confidence and battered truck onto the freeway, I rattle my way south to *Ski Country USA—Colorful Colorado.*

3 – Traveling

I am heading to the land of the uber-filthy rich. Aspen, Colorado. My generous sister has invited me to stay at her place—then in a week, carry on to the Land of the Lost. Lost Valley, the paleontologists call it.

I've already been lost for some years now, so this is somehow appropriate. But there is no certainty that a road exists to get me out of where my mind has wandered. Two hundred years ago, I was royalty in an obscure European country. The road has led over the cliff from there. But the genetic memory of castles and serfs still burns dimly within me. So I must try. Try to regain my elite sovereignty. Try to return to the kingdom of my soul.

The old truck rolls steadily along, gulping gas without the aid of a computer. It is a symphony of pots and pans on every road surface, every bump, every gust of wind. But reliable. Rather like riding a faster version of a water buffalo clad in scrap metal. I'm a little envious of the effortless new sedans, shaped like tapered turds, slipping through the toilet torrents of air. Cutting through the Ute Mountains behind the Salt Lake basin, my neck is rubbering around at the red rock in the sunset. I am reminded that the major cause of death among geologists is gawking at road cuts while driving.

But I have bigger problems. The highway is a snake. It is pitch black now except for the blinding headlights blasting me in the oncoming lane. I have two lemon ice cream cones for lights that would barely detect a sheet rock wall ten feet away. I can't see shit. My dash lights are all burned out so there is no information about speed—or if I have any oil—or if the gizmo is overheating—or if the battery is charging. I gyrate the side mirror so the brights of the asshole behind me might illuminate the speedometer, but nearly crash in the futile process. *The hell with it.* Who needs all that crappy information anyway? I'll just listen to the purr of the motor. Sense the heat of the engine. Feel the inertia of the banked road. This is the Helen Keller method of navigation. Some of the curves, though, are like when she tried to read the cheese grater.

In Price I get a motel room. The sign says \$49 a night. The counter guy is an Untouchable from India, maybe a Thuggee.

"I'll take the room," I say.

"How many be there are you?" says he.

"Just one." What the fuck does it look like?

"And what be the number of pets, to be pleased."

"No pets"—and I'm not pleasing any at this hour.

"Be you having any special needs now?" Like what? A Jello blow-up doll? A small boy?

"No needs. Is sleep a special need?"

"Not I to be understanding of your question, Sir."

"Whatever. What's the price? Fifty bucks?"

"Oh no, Sir. The room is 65 of the dollars."

"Yer goddamned sign says 49. What the hell?"

"Be pleased not to be annoyed. That is only rate for Bulgarian Special Olympic games. We are big supporters of program."

"What if I walk with a limp? Do I get a price reduction?"

"Ah-ha. You are being so funny. But this we cannot be doing."

"So what's the goddamned damage? I want to get the fuck out of this curry stinking lobby."

"We have free Inter-u netting in the room."

"Does that have something to do with computers?"

"Oh, yes. Certainly, Sir."

"Whatever. Give me the key."

"Dee total be coming to 81.37, if you be pleased, Sir."

"*What!* No, I'm not pleased. That's twice what the sign says."

"We must be giving to the city tax. The county room tax. The state accommodation tax. The sales tax and the large government tax. So many taxes. What can we be doing? It increases the price of the room."

"No shit."

"But there is a nice complimentary breakfast in the lobby from 6 to 6:30 AM. Nice pieces of bread with jam *and* coffee." Fuck me. Wouldn't want to miss curry jam at 6:30 AM.

"Here's the credit card. Give me the key."

"Oh yes. Being so velly velly pleased to do so. Please to now must be filling out this form."

Eventually the Thugee mugging concludes and I get into the room. I'm exhausted from the Braille driving. Place is not too bad. Not too dirty, only a three pubic hair rating.

In the late morning, after missing the curry bread breakfast, I smoke the last of my cigarettes and launch across the great American desert. I figure it's a wise move to detox around the sister, get any lingering family angst out on the table as the withdrawal rage besieges me. This way I can be as wild-eyed and irrational as they expect. Mile upon mile of sandstone wonders, 100-mile visibility, and mammoth trucks going only slightly slower than a commercial airliner. A few hours later, the road sucks into the canyon of the Colorado River, which becomes increasingly narrower and more majestic. The river is still a torrent of mud from the recent torrential rains. It looks thick enough to walk on. I imagine vertical trees rafting along in islands populated with deer and coyotes, or maybe chunks of malls, the Starbucks sign beckoning. This is actually not far from the truth.

Into the lair of the rich at last. All is multi-million-dollar mansions, groomed golf courses, swank clubhouses, finely paved streets with a plethora of planted flowers lining them. People in Patagonia parade leisurely by, fit and elegant. Turning into my sister's driveway, I am confronted by what looks like a lodge. I feel as though I'm here to rob the place. I'm expecting alarms to go off.

4 – Home

A gangly towheaded kid meets me at the door. I realize he is the grandson of sister Lauri, the abandoned prodigy of her 3rd son Doug. Looks nine-ish, but I think he is actually 12 or 13. Probably one of those testosterone-deficient teenagers. He's giving me the "You're a burglar" look.

"What up, my man? I'm your Uncle Charlie!" Not sure if that's right. I suffer from genealogy dyslexia.

"Yeah. OK," he says in a bored way, letting me in onto the hardwood floors. He's wearing a headset and holding a controller that looks like it operates the overhead cranes at US Steel. He slides back into a large leather chair, next to a leather couch, in front of a 40-inch flat screen with some military mayhem busily going on.

As he sits, there are some explosions on screen and hails of tracer bullets coming from all directions. "Aww, crap! Ya didn't have to do that!" he says. Do what? I think. I'm just standing here like a beggar in the IBM lobby. A laptop sits open on the table besides a few cell phones and controllers for some other cyber gadgets. A huge TV built into the wall is babbling on with some ignored show. All is hardwood, leather, and Persian rugs. "Yer never going to get away with this," the kid says as he leans to the left, his fingers hammering the controller. I realize he's talking to another kid on the headset, playing the cyber game against him on the screen. I haven't seen this level of technology since the last *Star Trek* movie.

"I'll just bring some of my stuff in." I venture out loud. A pause.

"Awww. Double crap!"

"Is that OK? Should I just put it here?"

"Whatever." he says in an irritated voice.

Suddenly a spectral figure the size of Magic Johnson appears on the golden staircase next to me. It is my brother-in-law John, who has glided down on plush carpet into my periphery vision.

"Ha! Did I surprise you?"

"Scared the shit out of me. Hi, John." I feel like I've been caught with the silverware. Where I come from, everything creeks or clunks when you walk on it. John is in a pressed business casual shirt and slacks. I'm rumpled and stained, dribbling small particles of organic and inorganic matter.

"Come on up," he says. Upstairs is a whole other house. You could rent this space to half the population of Hanoi. Everything is hardwood, granite counters, and leather furniture. Way upscale. I don't want to touch anything for fear I might contaminate it with the ShopCo look.

"Want some coffee?" He bellows, as if the sixteen-foot cathedral ceiling wouldn't echo his voice.

Of course I want coffee. To my surprise, he boils water in a common iron pot, the copper-stainless stuff staying on the designer rack. Then he stirs up a cup of Safeway Instant. Where's the double espresso Chilean bean bomb with cinnamon sprinkles? It's as if they are really poor, and all this is just so many props in some grand masquerade.

It turns out that this is true. Everything is rented, undented. The pots cannot be used nor the furniture sat upon for fear of not getting the damage deposit back. The seventy-five-cubic-foot refrigerator with a crushed ice dispenser has no food in it. Empty packages of Top

Raman litter the black stone counter. There is great gratitude from John that I have brought groceries, mostly chickens. Nutrients at last—to go with the noodles and instant coffee.

John goes into a monologue about how great things are going.

“This area is amazing! Everyone here is millionaires and billionaires. In fact, the millionaires are complaining that the billionaires are pushing them out. Haha. We went two years without work, and now we have five house-building jobs for people like Steve Jobs’ wife, the inventor of Saran Wrap, and the Discount Tire mogul. Ya know he started in his garage with four used tires? We have work that is just pouring in. I work mostly here at home for 7 AM to 7 PM. Things could not be better.” I look over at his computer and there is some POV game of tanks rolling through a bombed-out city. I wonder if he’s playing with the kid downstairs.

“That’s really great, John. I’m so happy for all of you. Where’s my sister Lauri?” Did they have to sell her for this opulence? Not that I would judge them for such a decision, but I hope she doesn’t have too much eye makeup on and a junkie-scratching problem.

“Oh she’ll be home soon. She’s out working.” Yaaaaa . . . I got that. But . . .

After fouling the triple-mirrored 47-light bathroom from my pent up travel ass, and moving my sea bag of dirty laundry into the main hall, I settle into the cherry stained kitchen table to hear more about how life is so grand. Eventually—with a slamming of doors and some yelling—my sister returns from work. Her job, it turns out, is *not* to work the Viagra tourists at the Flour de Fine art gallery, but a respectable gardening job, planting and then pulling flowers as the whim of the wealthy prevails. She is dressed in Land Rover designer travel pants and an Arc’teryx light jacket, totaling probably seven hundred dollars’ worth of clothes. There is a slight grass stain on one of the pant legs. I wonder if she is renting these also. As usual, she looks like a millionaire’s wife.

“Oh, Bro!” she yells, “You made it.” And gives me a warm hug. I don’t care if she’s dressed in gold leaf or painted in dog shit, this feels wonderful. My heart melts. I want to cry but the instant coffee has me too jacked up. I haven’t seen her since we planted our father a few years ago. She keeps looking curiously at the side of my face. This gets me wondering if I have a grease splotch there or a travel zit I haven’t noticed. Then I remember—when she last saw me, I had a tooth knocked out. I was the poster boy for the Idaho Hick Pageant. No room for such ugliness here. While holding my gape open with the index finger, I explain my cure.

“Nooth. Noth to worrthy,” spit now running into my palm. “Went to the Mexican dentist and he fixed me up. He said I needed to have the bone drilled, a stainless screw torqued in there with a special ratchet. Then I could have my choice of enamel, jade, or even a tooth with a diamond set in it. Only twenty-seven hundred bucks. I told him I had a hundred. Coveted to pesos that would be close to seven-fifty. He went back into the bathroom, broke another piece off the yellow toilet. Super glued it nicely into the gap. Doesn’t look too bad, does it? And I get to flush it twice a day.”

My sister eyes the fake tooth with dubious approval, then issues a sigh of relief. “Well, thank goodness. I was thinking I’d have to take you to one of the dentists here, and they are *really* expensive.” I can only imagine. Movie star teeth are the most valuable thing in America.

We sit at the fake cherry table and catch up on recent times. This includes a visit here from the New York stepmother, affectionately referred to as Bridezilla. We are both boned that Dad married her and signed over the puny inheritance.

“Ya know, she bitched about ever little goddamned thing here. The table wasn’t set

right. What kind of crap was this dinner? She hobbled around here and freaked out at the step between the kitchen and dining room.”

“Yeah. She does walk like she has a cucumber up her ass.”

“Fucking cripple, is what she is.”

“A mental cripple.”

“Then she get’s sick from the altitude or the potato salad. Or something.”

“Yes. She wrote me that she was bedridden for some days. That John was an angel and took care of her. Cleaned up after her.”

“My god! The bitch barfed everywhere! Never even tried to make it to the bathroom. Just hurled on the floor. Whining and sniveling all the way.”

“That’s disgusting. Dad must have died just to get away from her.”

“The cheap ass never gave us a penny in her ten-day stay. Never offered a fucking thing. Just bitched about everything.”

“Nooooo! Didn’t even buy a bag of groceries?”

“Not a fucking thing. You know she gets eighty-five thousand a year for being a widow to that first husband?”

“The pervert priest?”

“That’s him. He was humping the whole congregation.”

“Ya don’t say. Can’t hardly blame him with that snapper at home. She’s really some cheap, you’re saying then?”

“Fucking A! What a tight wad.”

“Ya think she poisoned Dad to get the condo?”—and so on. We hash over every detail. Every malevolent aspect we can imagine. I am paying close attention to prevent any cheapskate accusations that might become my history. Any sniveling complaints I could accidentally utter, including groaning unaware when rising from a chair. Think and act 20, I remind myself. I am a grateful couch surfer. Do the dishes.

The next day we have to go shopping. Lauri’s favorite occupation. I am the wardrobe focus, and will be needing considerable repair. There are holes in my shirts, intractable stains of questionable origin on everything, bum stubble on my face. We are going to live the *Celebrity Make-over*, though I’ve never seen the TV show—but hope it includes liposuction.

Somehow I steer her out of the tony shops on Main Street where the tennis shoes cost \$240. She tries to brace herself between the “on sale for \$150” racks, but I manage to pry her out without having to start a fire in the back room. We cross the tracks, passing through abandoned crumbling 1950s facades to where there is one last remaining business. JC Penney. Personally, I think this is way upscale, but I’m not allowed in the thrift stores anymore now. Time to corporate up and disguise my identity.

Lauri has a wonderful time dressing up her little brother. I’m back to four years old, and loving the attention. Normally I would grab the first thing and check out, but she has me piled up with thirty-seven pairs of pants and shirts, of which she insists I try on every one. Then to model in the mirrors for her approval. I’m easy, and compliant. This is like dog surgery. Just lie still there and take the pain. It is for my own good. Not any worse than a calculus test. Better than a police interrogation, but takes about the same time: three hours. Finally, we heap a pile on the counter that is in proportion to a food drop in Ghana. Candy, the purveyor, has an acidic attitude that does not match her pigtails. She is 74 and resembles last year’s Halloween Mars bar that got melted and re-crystallized all through July and August. Her skin is wrinkly

and white, like the bleached crust seen on old dog shit.

She gleefully rings everything up. 457 dollars. My sister lies about some other sales clerk who said we can get 70% off this, 45% off that. The shrew scrunches up her face, similar to when you slide a sock off your foot. “Noooo. These items are not on sale.”

“Well. That’s why we got them. You can’t expect us to pay full price?” My sister says. A look of disbelief crosses the clerk’s face.

“There may be some coupons that apply. Let me check.” She rummages furiously under the counter. My sister looks the epitome of the super rich who bitch over every dime. Stately and erect in comparison to the hunched and shriveled Candy. Lauri is the wealthy type who clips coupons for ice cream cones. If it wasn’t for the poor paying full price, the economy would be more destroyed than it is. I’m a stupid shopper. The poor fool who just wants to pay full fare and get out of there. But I hang back to see my sibling’s craft. Candy re-emerges with a handful of coupons and runs them through the scanner, each with a discouraging beep. The kind of beep you get when you try to bypass a computer question.

“I’m sorry, but none of these coupons apply.” A very peeved look from my advocate.

“What about the JC Penney’s half-price sale?” How did Lauri know about that?

“Ooooha. OK. Let me check.” More rustling around under the counter, coming up with a flyer.

“Here it is. You were right!” Big smiles all around at this triumph. Run through the scanner. The fatal beep again. Then silence.

“Ooooha. That sale ended yesterday. I’m afraid I can’t give you the discount. Sorry.” Smiles transform to steely stares. My sister’s neck elongates and a snooty eye language of rolling toward the ceiling lets Candy know that she should go back to the trailer park and shoot herself. My advocate swivels on her 120-dollar shoe and beckons me to follow. The deal is over. I am a bit stupefied. How can we leave all this treasure here in this pile that took half a day to select? The temperature has dropped twenty degrees. As Laurie takes the first step, Candy erupts anew.

“Oh, what the hell! I’ll just give you the discount. But not on the underwear and the belt. Let’s just do it.” Everything all smiles and jokes again. The rich lady loves the poor again and all is right with the universe. I’m wondering if that’s the fatal statement—“let’s just do it”—that Candy said fifty years ago in the back seat of the Chevy. The one that got her pregnant and relegated her stature in life to jobs like this. I wonder if she’ll get fired for the illegal discount. Two-hundred fifty dollars is the new total. I don’t really care about Candy’s fate. It is harsh, but ugly has to go its own way. My clever sister and I skip out to the parking lot. I buy her a 40-dollar lunch for her talents. Now I am a poser peacock.

* * * * *

Joe Coleman



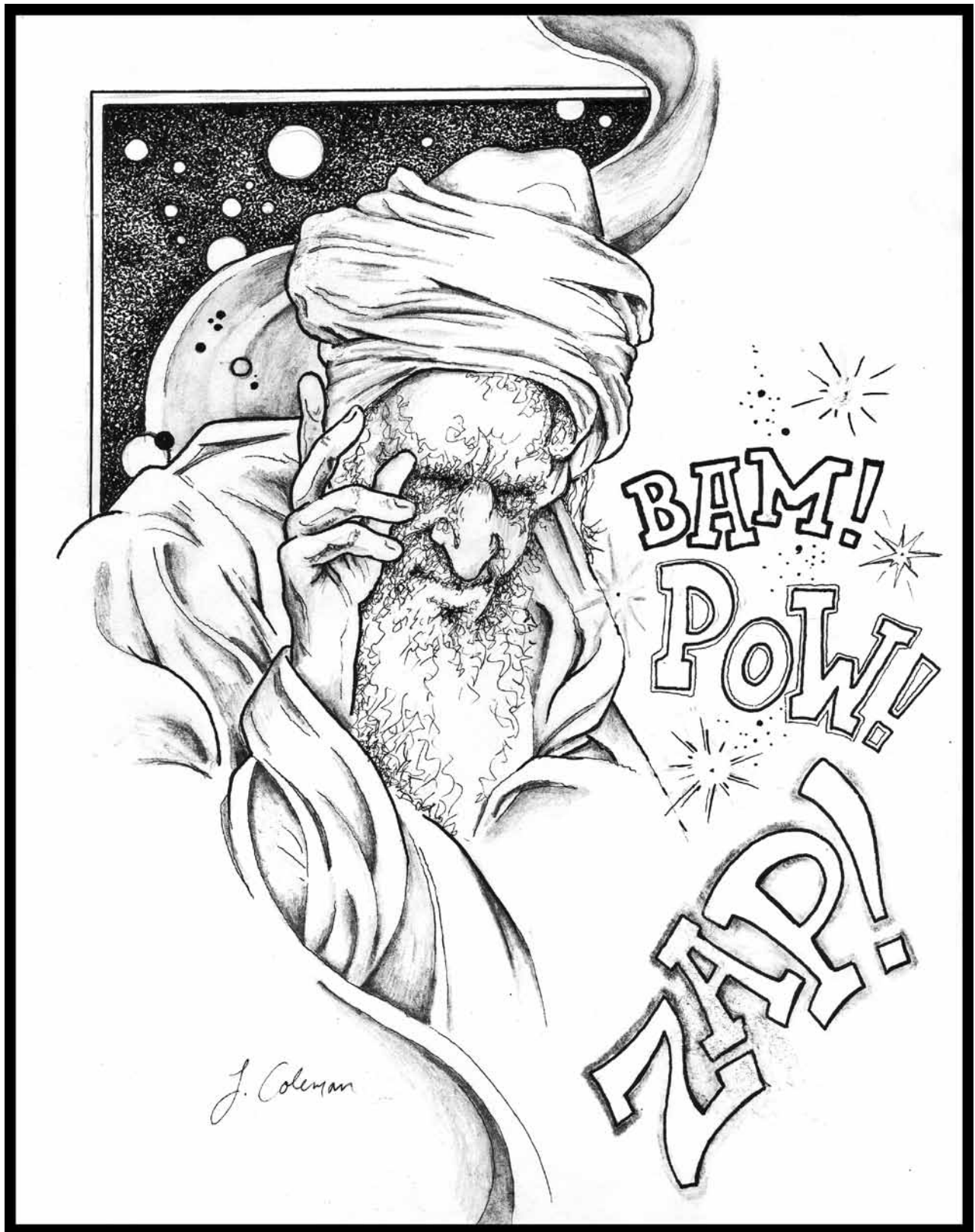
Howard Went Up to the Delicatessen of the Lord

And the Lord spoke forth from a burning bagel
 yet the bagel was not consumed by flame.
 Then the Lord called, “Howard!”—Howard was floored.
 Howard replied, “That’s my name . . .”
 “No,” said the Lord, “I re-name you Herbert.
 Herbert you are forevermore.”

Herbert, formerly Howard, asked, “Lord—
 what the Hell did you do that for?”
 “‘Cause I wanted to name somebody Herbert,”
 the Lord said, “I like the sound of it.
 You’re the first Herbert I ever named.”

Then Herbert muttered, “*Shit*—
 People will call me ‘Herb’ and ‘Herbie,’
 as if ‘Howie’ wasn’t bad enough.”

“My ways are mysterious,” explained the Lord.
 “Deal with it. Life is tough.
 I could have renamed you ‘Dewey,’ ‘Eugene,’
 —remember the boy named Sue . . . ?
 I switched my son’s handle to ‘Jesús’ . . . Jesús!
 My niño’s a very unusual Jew.”



“Forgive me if I have angered you, Lord,”
 said Herbert. The Lord said, “Okay.
 I am full of compassion and mercy, Herbie—
 and I am just. Oh! By the way . . .
 as regards your last name, ‘Smith,’ too boring . . .
 I can’t stand it. Kinda lame . . .
 ‘Smith,’ it makes me think of a cough drop . . .
 ‘Smith’ is a common, pedestrian name.

Henceforth your last name is changed to ‘Hynde,’
 H • Y • N • D • E
 You are ‘Herbie Hynde.’ Ha-Ha!”
 said the Lord, giggling humorously.
 “Last week I altered Alfred Davis,
 enjoying a bit of omnipotent fun.
 Now he’s Harold Balzac. ‘Harry Balzac . . .’
 That’s a hilarious one!”

“You have to be kidding!”
 “Nope. I did it,”
 said the Lord (who-does-what-He-wills).
 “I could make elephants fly if I wanted.
 You gotta admit I got skills—
 which I’ll demonstrate by changing your face:
Bang!—some big buck teeth . . .
Boom!—jug ears, freckles, a uni-brow,
 and crossed beady-eyes underneath
 a receding hairline . . . *Zap!* pointed head . . .
Wham!—new nose, hairy pimple . . .
Snap!—you have fish lips . . . *Slam!* —herpes sores . . .
Bam!—double-chin with a dimple!”

“Anything else, Lord?”

“Yeah, get ready for webbed toes on your feet
and *Pow!*—a superfluous mammary.”

“What?”

“You now have a extra teat!”

“Must you, Lord?”

“Yup. It’s simply my whimsy displaying divine redesigning.”

“Please, Lord, I beg you to reconsider . . .”

“*No way.* Sorry, Herb. Stop whining!”

Herbert Hynde (the previous Howard Smith)

inquired of the Lord, “why me?”

and the Lord looked at Herb as the holy bagel
that held the Lord burned continuously.

“I don’t know, Herbie-boy,” smiled the Almighty
as a knife and fork changed to His rod and staff,

“I can’t quite put my finger on it . . .

Something about you makes me laugh!”

And the Lord rose up out of the holy bagel.

And the delicatessen was filled with smoke.

And the Lord ordered one cheese blintz and a coffee.

And Herbie Hynde sat there
not getting the joke.

* * *

Story of Isaac

The blinkered sacrificial hope
to appease his feral deity
was savage superstitious fear
which Abraham termed piety
as Isaac, trussed and unaware,
lay stretched across the old deceit
that God can be propitiated
by blood poured at His feet.
Angelic hands that stayed the blade,
that stopped a father's falling knife,
did not assuage God's sacred lust.
He still demanded life:
a first-born son,
a paschal lamb,
to slake His thirst as yet unquenched
despite the tidal
waves of
red
in which His world is drenched.

* * *

I'll Try to Explain . . .

There's a 'Fifties Sock hop
 but they can't get in.
 So the angels dance on the head of a pin.
 How many angels are dancing there . . . ?
 Can they minuet? Tango?
 Why should we care?
 Could the Almighty fashion a circular square?
 Suppose Adam's apple had been a pear . . .
 Would things have been different if Noah could fly?
 —If Holy Moses had missed Sinai
 and climbed the slopes of Everest instead?
 What if Goliath was just "playing dead"?
 What if Isaiah invented short pants?
 Why would the angels have time to dance?
 What if pigs were as tiny as bumblebees?
 (You wouldn't have bacon in B.L.T.s.
 And if gigantic termites the size of a bear
 started feeding on shelving, bedframe, and chair,
 home-furnishing stores would shut down everywhere.)
 If angels were sharper, they'd dance on air.
 After all, they are blessed with angelic wings.
 It's awfully hard understanding some things . . .

* * *

I Like Cookbooks

Poems are somewhat like farts:
they are things I don't want to hear.
When not written well they really smell.
Their ink stinks up eye, nose, and ear.

What do poets do?
Write a rhyming line or two!
(I eschew haiku!).

Nor do I get any kick
from a cleverly crass limerick.
I say with a grin
as I wipe off my chin:
"Limericks make me sick."

Poets are literate nerds;
tapestry-weavers taking pains
at journal-looms warp-woofing words.
I cordially disdain quatrains.

And TO HELL WITH THE VILLANELLE!

I've no room for canto or pantoum . . .
I prefer tuna salad to couplet or ballad,
Oscar Mayer weiners to sestinas.

I'd rather a cold sip of Sanka
than the tiniest drip of a tanka.
I would stuff all free verse
in the back of a hearse
and bury the Gones of canzones.

How I wish I could trade my Minolta
for a gun and one shot at a volta
—after which I'd aim its muzzle
to bring down the rare, endangered ghazal.

I would sooner face the Apocalypse
than perusal of any more manuscripts,
anthologies, or poet-collections.
I like cookbooks.
I need clear directions.

* * *

Rocks

can tell you.
They have experience.
Disregard the garden's flowery speech . . .
useless discussion with tongues of flame.
Dirt lies.
Stones and rocks will explain why life is hard.

* * * * *





Baby Steps Up into the Sky

[Travel Journal]

In October 1994 I was back in Secoya territory with the goods for Joaquín: a steamer trunk with a padlock and a kilo of multicolored glass beads. I also brought a big pair of rubber boots for myself, and six hundred dollars that magically expanded in buying power as soon as they entered the weaker economy of Ecuador.

I found that Joaquín and Maribel had moved in with their son Rufino, Rufino's pregnant wife Katia, and their four children, Fermín, Luis, Xiomara, and Mecías. The eight of them lived in two homes. One was Rufino's two-story house, roofed with zinc sheeting. The other was a small palm-thatch hut near a new palm-thatch cabin that Rufino had built for hosting tourists.

After working for a Quito-based company, Rufino had become licensed as a guide and then started working independently. He was a small, energetic man with perfect Spanish and a ready smile. He reminded me of one of the family's kitchen knives: sharp, quick, and with a thousand uses.

Soon Joaquín and I were sitting in hammocks in the dark, beginning a *yagé* ceremony in the new tourist cabin, which Rufino had christened *Cabaña Supernatural*. As I drank the bitter brew in Supernature, I remembered Jamie Bear saying in Mexico that the tipi was the world's first spaceship, and I wished the good outlaw were here to travel the stars with us in this supernatural cabin.

As I begin to choom, Joaquín reminds me of Yoda: short, stout, with reptilian toes, idiosyncratic grammar, strange powers. The rainforest seems a swamp planet. I remember that Luke Skywalker's last name was supposed to come from some tribe's word for shaman.

I have a hammock to myself this time, and I swing in it. It's an archaic flight simulator. This is how people here learn to walk in the sky. It's not too late for me to be a kid here—to have a happy childhood, with Joaquín as my new father. I swing high. At the apex of my backswing, I stand, freeze, look around. *Stop on a dime*, I tell myself. *No matter how things are going, we need to know how to stop*. Then I swing again.

I sit still with my feet on the ground. Wordless melodies chart the flight of my thoughts. I sing better than I ever have before. My voice soars high, sunlit—a white bird among golden spirals high above my head.

I'm great at this! I'm going to become famous as a musician!

With that thought, I hit a false note, and my song plunges, tumbling, Icarus-like.

The sonic fall slams me into the psychological ground.

Pain leads to anger. I growl. Jaguar energy seeps in. My strength builds. I sing again, deep this time.

I get it. This is how it is for humans. We overreach ourselves, we're defeated, we fall down, we get back up, renewed like Antaeus by Mother Earth, growling as our pain changes

into rage and strength. Our power rises and transforms into beauty and all kinds of art that describe and give pleasure to our journey—until once again we lose control and fall. Thus civilizations rise and fall like waves on the sea.

Joaquín calls me to him. I sit cross-legged on the floor in front of his hammock. By the golden light of the kerosene lamp, he rolls a cigar of locally-grown tobacco in a semi-dry banana leaf. I'm seeing with every intensity the efficient movements of the man's hands. Young people have abundant energy, I reflect, and we waste vast amounts of it doing things wrong. Through making mistakes, we can find the right way. As we get older, we have less and less raw energy to work with, while our skill constantly increases—up to a certain point, and then we begin to stoop, and one day fall to earth for the last time and rise again in spirit form.

My teacher ignites a lighter and applies its flame to the cigar, then begins to sing, wobbly, insistent, shaking a bundle of spearhead-shaped fresh leaves like the one he used in our first ceremony. He's told me that the leaf fan's name in Paicoca is *mamecocó*. It makes a sound like *sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh* as again and again the leaves flick toward me, green snake tongues making gusts of wind. It's directly between his face and mine so it becomes a mask of moving leaves, the shaman a leaf-headed man, a were-plant. Like the Coras' *anás*, the *mamecocó* is a spirit from above. Joaquín's possessed by it, allowing it to guide his movements and do the healing work, filling my soul with fresh, green energy.

The rhythm of shaking leaves breaks off. The *uncucui* puffs on the cigar and blows smoke on the *mamecocó*, then whooshes with his breath as he uses the instrument like a broom to clean the area around my head, and flick away whatever bad energy it has dislodged. "*Hnnn*," he says gently in Paicoca. "*Ya*."

"*Gracias*." I make my way back to the hammock I was in before. I light a cigarette and go walking around the hut. The orange ember glows exquisite in the darkness. I'm not normally a smoker but I brought a pack of Full Speeds for the ceremonies, and I get the point of smoking now. It's that since prehistory, smokers have had a material and psychological advantage—the realization of a great dream our distant ancestors had. Possession of fire.

Of course, one pays for it with one's health. Nothing's free.

Leaning against a post of the hut like a guard, I contemplate the glowing tip and think about my mother's father, an immigrant from rural southwestern Ireland. Like Jamie, he was a hunter. But he worked as a prison guard. He smoked unfiltered Camels as he sat up late with his rifle in the tower in Jackson, Michigan. Lit by an ember, the tall, uniformed man leans back on a chair with his feet up on a table. He stares out the window at the same floodlit lawn every night. He stopped seeing it years ago. He blinks, wonders about his four children's futures. A rifle is propped up next to him. On the table, a tray with an empty plate; he scraped off its contents out the window to feed the family of skunks that lives near the foot of the guard tower. There's a suck of inhalation, a silence in which he feels his heartbeat, a whoosh of exhalation. He thinks about his life passing in this way, breath by smoky breath in the presence of this orange glow. If someone escapes, he's supposed to fire at the body.

One night an inmate went sprinting across the dark ground and the rifle rose. He hit the man in the leg, bringing him down. Killing animals had given him the marksmanship to spare a human life.

I barely knew him. Two packs of cigarettes a day and he died of a heart attack at 70.

Why do my thoughts always lead to death?

There's a buzz in the distance. A boat's approaching, its sound drifting down from a

couple of bends up the river. It's moving slowly to avoid sunken logs. As an exercise in self-defense, I decide to pretend it's dangerous. I work out how the hut could be defended against intruders coming up from the river. I calculate angles of attack and defense. We could lie on the floor near the edge and shoot them as they ran up the slope. The floorboards would stop birdshot but maybe not buckshot.

I wonder where the guns are kept in the smaller hut where Joaquín's family is sleeping. I know where the axes and machetes are, but not the guns. That makes sense. At a certain point, and not before, when you stay in people's homes, you learn where they keep their guns. The boat passes. Inhaling cigarette smoke like a soldier now, I listen to the craft purring downriver. Who's in it, where are they going, what are their stories?

And why was I imagining fighting them?

The cigarette has burned down almost to the filter. I stub it out and inhale the darkness. Violence is a vague dream dissolving in calm, in cool, in black, in the ringing, reverberating peace of the jungle night. All is peace is all.

Back to my hammock. Time to sleep.

Joaquín says, "Do you want another cup?"

"No thanks."

"Do you want to drink *yagé*?" His intonation is nearly flat.

Because in this state I can hear so clearly what is said and unsaid, I understand what this means. If I don't want to drink *yagé*, we can stop right now, no problem, and that'll be the end of the apprenticeship. But if I want to continue, I'll need to drink *yagé* as the drinkers of the past did. As I stand there holding the rope of my hammock, I recall an anthropologist's observation that a shamanic apprenticeship is like studying at a university, and if you want to graduate, you can't just sit through the first fifteen minutes of class and then go home. I concede, "Yes, OK, another cup, please." I choke down the bitter fluid and recline in the hammock. Nothing happens. I rock there in the darkness, observing my thoughts. Eventually I perceive my teacher snoring.

My stomach revolts and I need to vomit. I head down off the hut and give the *yagé* to the grass between some bushes. A clear, bright twenty-meter snake is floating above the trees, its luminous body made of multicolored vines. The *yagé* serpent. I greet it telepathically, observe it without staring, return to my hammock, wrap myself in a blanket, and sleep.

Over breakfast the next morning, don Joaquín told me that during a ceremony I shouldn't go wandering around, but stay in the hammock, whatever happened, even if I needed to vomit or shit myself; clothes and hammocks could be easily washed in the river.

His voice betrayed his disappointment with me. He'd seen me reluctant to proceed, and he'd questioned my commitment.

For my part, I had a sneaking suspicion that the shaman was just an eccentric old man. Otherwise, why was he the only Secoya who wanted to drink *yagé*? Perhaps some part of me gave credence to my mother's notion that shamans were nothing but jungle junkies.

In our next ceremony, another shaman participated, which gave me confidence that this *yagé* drinking was more than a quirk of Joaquín's. In accordance with that conviction, I tried to drink with the determination that was expected of an apprentice in this tradition.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Ninth Series

"Open hands, touch, & teach others how"

xli. Sacral

Wakes. She wakes. The pain in her back
grabs her breath & she wilds for air
among covers. A snatch, another,
there. A noise outside, which world
this time? Oh. Dogs barking. *Oh*.

Lies back. That dream. The Island.
A breath not hers. A man's shoulder,
his bare chest. Still sleeping. Quicks her
query.

Closes her eyes, mostly, feels it out.
A taste on her tongue. His? No spilled
seed tastes like this. It tingles. It . . . listens?

There is the softest *hmmm* on her skin,
in her breath, in the air. Her nose
twitches, *twitches*? & sniffs something potent,
mysterious, important. The man sudden
harasses his covers. She sniffs again. Just his scent,
on him, lingering on her.

Shuts her eyes more, dares. *That dream*.
Its barest remain. A question she tugged
from it, maybe a thread back in. How?
What rhymes with the moon?
What rhymes with the moon?

She relaxes, tries to gentle into this body,
its pale-rose, bone contoured heat.
The man is here for its pleasures, perhaps
nothing more.

And her? Something to do with the *Hummm*
 in the air. He'd led her closer somehow,
 his voice, that instrument in the corner
 of the room, among their tangled clothes.

Remembers. *Oh*. The pain that'd awaked her was her own
 making, her alarum, the *Hummm* plainest
 in early morning, when the lights from windows
 & those within have not fully reassembled
 this world's architecture from its dream bolts & limbs.

xlii. Iris

Embrace it all. Let it go. See what remains.
 The beginnings of a new knowing? More colors?
 Wilder music. No questions. No destiny. No why.

None else but to sing true. Singing,
 the air soft, biteless, the full moon
 teasing a hint like always. She dances.

Embrace it all. Let it go. See what remains.
 Her head full of the cavern spring she'd found
 that day, how following it had excited her,
 how she felt it would come to somewhere,
 bring her somewhere, follow, follow,
 bring me home. *Bring me home*.

I don't know who I am. I don't know what to expect.

Come to the great field, the tall costumes
 of pirates & panda bears, the mocking shouts
 about human-hacked worlds & what so much
 left, how much the rest? Sun slithered
 away, eventide, full moon coming on
 like a virgin getting her fine due at last
 & carry on now, carry hours on.

Embrace it all. Let it go. See what remains.
 This universe a myth, a bite, a shiver.
 She follows through decoration & bonfire
 to the music, the drums, yes, the shouts,
 yes. The guitars, there, *yes*. Closer she comes,
 more it's her body they strum.

I don't know who I am this time. My body
 is finding someone to explain.

I find you playing more animal than mind
 & I near, & I near you. You strum your
 instrument & there are words but
 I displease deep into your mind, touch
 there, & there, listen to this in your ear,
 now hum. *Hummmmmmm*. Yes. *There*.

Whatever I am, I call down the moon
 upon you, & the clearing is empty but us.

You stop strumming & smile. Kneel before me.
 A few magical earthy nuggets to feed me,
 a drink of water to wash me down.

Embrace it all. Let it go. See what remains.
 I don't know who I am this time.
 "I am thousands of years old," I say
 in your embrace, "but you will hum & explain."

Somewhere, someone, who & who in
 the world by light. Dream of the
 cavern's running water releases her
 to his soft hand on her breast, tender,
 her thighs sore by hard play. "You don't
 taste a thousand years old," he growls.

I thrash for your guitar to give bones
 the night's dreams. "Play." "Sing?"
 "Hum." He strums simply man-hard
 at first, her fine ass, biting her tits
 to hear her cry. But then I move atween
 your thighs & begin to play you with
 my fingers & tongue. My turn to scratch
 & bite, my turn to squeeze & listen,
 squeeze harder & listen.



But you're the musician, you've fucked
 many a girl with a strange idea.
 Playing with me upon your prick
 is a game, & I like it, like it
 more, & my playing thickens, yowls
 to the stretching cock veins in your
 laps, my *hummm* summons dragonflies
 & mountain lions, finally I melt
 into knowinglessness, release to
 the wordless cream of being.

She drinks him in, & in, dry & drier,
 empty & shriveled, all nerves smiling
 & gone.

The cavern. My friends.
 The Island. The Gate. *Why am I here?*

You were not a girl. You were a thousand
 years old. *I don't know what you are.*

I embraced it all. I let it all go.
 No questions. No destiny. No why.
 I am & I sing true always now,
 & just for you.

xliii. Disenthrall

I know nothing. I am nobody.
 There is no answer. There is sadness &
 morning light. The Hum always &
 it is beautiful, & it tells me nothing.

I startle & awake. The musician
 is gone yet searches for me.
 I hear his music still, hear it deepen,
 hear it sadden. Less becoming art,
 or appeal, more a simple burning warmth
 for lonely hearts open to it, light
 to show them their path on. But he
 never stays. He searches.

The cavern. My friends.
 The Island. The Gate. *Why am I here?*
 Why can't I be there with you?

One morning I walk out into this world
 & there is dirty snow piled against
 the streets, & birds twittering & chuckling
 the air, & I look into faces as they pass,
 & I listen in a little, to each's bright tangle.
 Look down at my own hands. Clench, unclench.

I sniff the trees scattered through
 the city, they are ill, they languish.
 I sniff deeper. They despair *especially of me*.
 I kneel & beg for more but nothing.

A soft hand on my shoulder. Two bright
 tangled faces. "Are you alright, Miss?"
 "Oh. Yes. Thank you."

They offer me water & nuts. Help me
 to a bench, look me over close,
 do not sniff but nearly so.

We begin to travel together. It's what
 they do. Their knapsacks & walking sticks,
 water pouches & good eyes for camping
 & not too long. They sleep in one blanket
 & gift me the other. Feed me. Tend me.

Then I dream of the Musician. He has
 followed me to the caverns, my friends.
 Stands looking at me.

"I can't love you. It's not what
 I am for. *Understand*."
 He strums. My friends come closer,
 the White Bunny, turtle that isn't
 a turtle. Even the combustible imp
 stills a little, listens. He strums more.

"No."
 "You can't get there alone. It's not how
 it works. *You need my song*. I will keep
 playing for you. Keep listening."

I know nothing. I am nobody.
 I awake to sadness & morning light.
 These Travelers cannot help me.
 They feed me. They tend me.

It happens unhappily one morning
 at market. Their kind gesture to the son
 of the wrong man. He strikes & kills one
 of the Travelers without pause. Would kill
 the other but my hand goes out. He disappears.
 His son cries out, & I relent. But I cannot
 bring the dead one back.

Kneeling over the dead Traveler,
 I realize the Hum has left him.
 The crying of the other, the fear of
 the gathered crowd. The son
 huddled close his returned father.
 The father panting, eyeing me, waiting.

Music. *I hear the Musician strumming.*
 Strumming a path away, it lights
 & waits too. I want to bring
 the other Traveler, help bury her friend,
 mourn with her.

No. The music compels me separate.
 "It's their peace to make. It's yours
 to go now."

I don't understand but sniff.
 The path he plays is true & true
 as any Creature. I walk it,
 slowly, leading away from the city
 streets & their trees.

But this: the trees less despairing
 now as I walk it.

xliv. Errata

Would you save this world,
you will suffer this world.

Would you love this world,
you will suffer this world.

Would you know this world,
you will suffer this world.

She wakes. It always begins
with the Creatures.

Looks at me. "Why?"
I say nothing. These White Woods
are quiet, still, but murky, unsettled.
The trees are tall. There is no path. We walk.

You listen, stop, listen more urgently.
There it is . . . the *Hummm* . . . always the *Hummm* . . .

"The Creatures?"
"No. It's the Gate."
Nods. You are smaller than me. Still,
shaped like a girl. I am tall & clumsy.
Waits my eyes return to hers, smiles.
"The Creatures?"

I nod. Take your hand. "They protect
as they can. They are often small &
vulnerable, so they attract our touch,
our slow breath to care, to sing.
To protect. Tell secrets to. Cry with."

I think. "They came with you from
Emandia. You came here, one of many,
to many worlds, & you survived,
you & the other."

She nods. We sit together, against
a white trunk, the light is murky
but the air calm. Not not telling.

"Is this helping you?" I ask.
 "Is it helping you?" she replies, sharply,
 still smiling.

I close my eyes, try to breathe my best
 & make it words. Scribble, speak.
 "Would you save this world, you will
 suffer this world. Would you love
 this world, you will suffer this world.
 Would you know this world, you will
 suffer this world.

"It has to mark you, before & after
 you decide. You have to travel
 its places & years. Feel immortal
 some moments, worse than despair
 others. You have to grow green.
 You have to be a predator of a
 thousand kinds. You have to be prey.
 The kind that escapes & the kind
 that doesn't, or somewhat doesn't."

She is listening. I'm nowhere yet
 but trying.

I think. Draw deep into my mind's pen.
 "The myth does not end with you choosing
 to stay. It continues. It's open-ended.
 You're committed."

"So what do I do?"

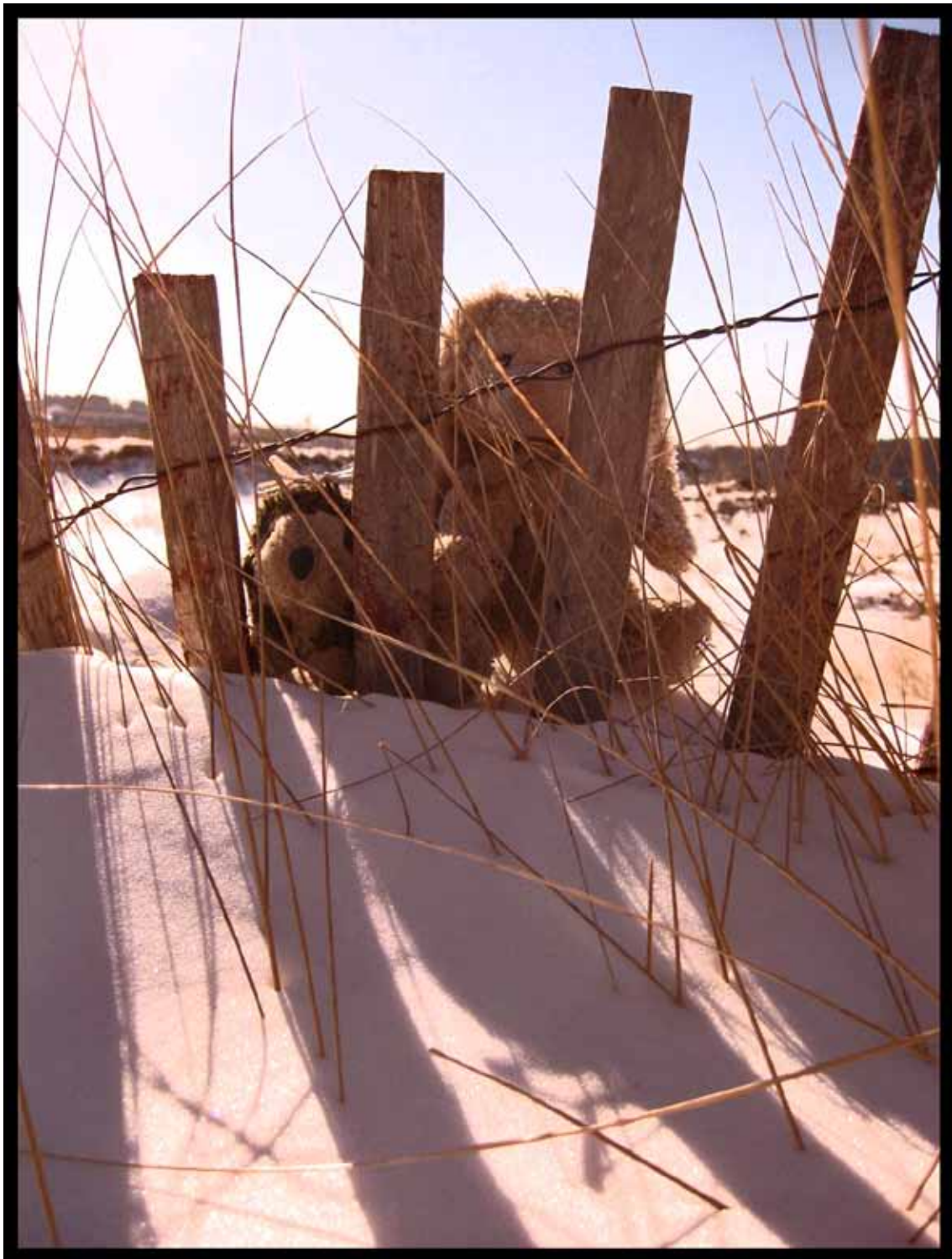
I pause, think. The skies above now
 powerfully starred. That's good.
 That's something.

I hold out my hand. Nod. Again. *Insist.*

There is a soft cackle. Another.

The black & white imp sudden in my hand.
 Crazy eyes. The Princess stares.

I hold out the imp for show. She
 gnaws my palm, waiting.



“Is she from Emandia?”
 She looks at me. Nods. Shakes her head.
 “Exactly. You brought something here
 to this world, made somewhere else,
 but grown here.” Pause. Give a little
 shake to dis-jaw. “Talk!”

She looks at me, crazy wide-eyed.
 “Eh?” A deaf old lady. A mock.
 “Talk!”

She cackles, high & low, click-clicks
 & noise-noises for extra pepper,
 scans lazily for escape routes.

“Just one word. And you can go.”

She stares upon me, a thousand feet &
 an inch tall. Nods, I think. Blows me
 a kiss, a spark, “fire,” all light,
 all dark, & she’s gone.

I nod. The Princess breathes hard.
 “OK. But what then?”
 “To be here is *to be vulnerable*,
 to feel alone. To age. To regret.
 To die, or feel like it.”

My abilities gone.
 Yes.
 Mortal.
 Yes.
 Can I die?
 Yes. And no.

I don’t think it’s that straight. Once
 you occupy a body, even when it dies,
 it bleeds & dusts back to earth,
 its years awl the world, its breathing,
 its being, changes the world.

Nothing is truly gone, and yet forms
 rise & fall. We mourn their passing,
 fear our own. We don't find enough
 comfort in memories or markers or songs.
 We try, but the years corner us,
 again, & again, take & do not return
 by our will.

"Creatures," you say again.
 I nod. "Creatures."
 She stands up. Helps me up too.
 She grasps me close for a moment,
 giving me more than I ask because
 I try. And she's gone.

*[For a moment I let Creatures
 near me, more & more of them.
 The White Bunny. Her hedgehog companion.
 The little black bear who hummms.
 The purple furry Creatures, dancing
 with ribbons & bows. Not a word.]*

*[They all sniff me twice, as more
 come into view. Bloo-eyed Kittees.
 A number of bears. The giraffes, of course.]*

*[Look at each other, as though sniffs
 being compared. As though necessary.]*

*[The White Bunny hops up to my shin,
 a raised pink nose & I lift her up. I do.]*

*[Leans into my ear. With a paw's gesture
 & a soft word. "Scribble Scribble Scribble."
 By way of advice. By way of mojo.
 By way of command too.]*

I nod. "Help me. Please."
 They nod. I sit among them &
 we sniff far, find the Princess
 as she undresses, as she sleeps.
 Lets the breathing blanket that is
 her body arrive completely. Dreams.
Dreams good.

xlv. Prince of Nothing

He was the prince, of nothing at all.
 A great shouldered black man,
 with long blonde hair, who I met
 as I was leaving the White Woods.
 Kneeling hunched over a dead fire,
 staring hard into nothing at all,
 as though, just gone, it had been a better world.

I sniffed twice, & joined him in kneeling.
 He turned to me after awhile, after dark,
 & I felt like his compensation for what
 he'd just seen, just lost. We buried
 that dead fire, buried it good, & became
 the lightest, laughinest, of lovers.
 Whatever I am, whatever I was.

We long traveled & there were nights
 when I made him love me so that
 I could remember. Our hips would slip
 & grind, I'd gnash him deeper, till it hurt,
 & *I would see*. My childly bedroom wall.
 Me dreaming. Its gaping passage in.
 He would hold me aloft till crying
 sweat & then bellow all the night
 into me, that better world, new just gone.

We had to part. High surf just outside
 our door, an abandoned inn but for
 its many hallways of sparkling ghosts. We had
 to part. Standing the inmost
 hall, a great glass tribute to a drowned
 whale, the hands of long gone guests
 impressed into the glass's surface.
We had to part. "I'll come again."
 His leaving smile. "You always do."

He was my prince, of nothing at all.
 A great shouldered black man,
 with long blonde hair, who I met
 as I was leaving the White Woods.
 Kneeling hunched over a dead fire,
 staring hard into nothing at all,
 as though, just gone, there was a better world.

The time in walking silence, holding my limbs
 at night alone. Eventually the new tastes of food.
 A long morning shower. A brush through my hair.

Now come to this city, a green city on the sea,
 & the remaining loneliness to find who I need,
 & the remembrance of his love to believe that I can.

xlvi. The Head & the Tail

My childly bedroom. Me dreaming.
 Into the tunnels. Into the cavern.
 Great cavern with its great tree,
 heightless height. Me breathing lighter
 than ever. *Please don't let it end.*

Wake. I wake & wild for air among
 my covers. The pain in my back I need
 & cannot anyway rid. A snatch. Another.
 There. A noise outside. Which world
 again this time? *Dogs barking. Oh.*

Wait, that. A jangling song still. On my
 bedstand a pink radio shaped like a cat.
 I'd seen it in a store of old things. I sympathize.
 I am an old thing too. Wearing by day
 the long dresses & crushed scents of girls,
 who wonder to know their single, brief lives.
 Mortal, too, like them. Not really.

On the floor of my room, schoolbooks.
 This is what the young do. They excitedly culture
 their minds with the political & godly myths
 of their land & time. I read it, & so little
 of it makes sense. They cut off the head &
 the tail of history's snake & study its remaining
 length like an answer.

I am lonely. No White Bunny. No turtle
 not a turtle. No giraffes. No tiny imp.

But not not them either. For however
 my days are, call the mud of the streets
 truths, brightest stars in the skies, lying to be
 among them, my nights are for the cavern,
 for its truer truths, what lost, what remembered.
 The great tree. Heightless height.

I am lonely. Go to taverns with the other
 students. Drink the poisons they all
 smiling down. Sloppily crash pathways
 to their own honest feelings. They are lonely.
 It feels good to dance & sing. *It feels good
 to fuck.*

Men hardly more than boys sniff me
 & I remind myself I look barely more
 than a girl. They sniff this slender body
 but not its mind thousand thousand
 years old. They smile, shyly approach.

I try to love them like the Prince,
 the Musician before him, but they cry,
 they bleed, they break. Only once,
 hands tied, legs bound apart,
 a blindfold & gag for focus. You shudder
 so hard inside me. *Abhhhhh.*
 Someone there. Breathing softly. *Behind the wall.*

Soon none of the students will drink
 with me or fuck me. A little lost.
 I close my curtains, close my door.
 Dream in my bed always. *Unwilling the no.*

Hurling my slight childly dream body
 against the wall, again, again.
 Aches, breaks. *Again, again.*

"Princess."
 I pause, heaving.
 "Princess!"
 "Yes! You're there."
 "I am. Please stop."
 "I'm in & shut out both. Why? What that
 useless waking life?"
 "I think . . . it's not enough to suffer."
 "What else?"
 "You have to confess what you believe,
 who you believe in, stand by them
 while the world disdains."
 "What do I do?"
 "I'll see you." I wake. Pain. *Shit.*
 Clock radio. Schoolbooks.

I knew you in the store right away.
 A toy. Yet my friend. *Turtle not a turtle.*
 I carried you home like the whole world
 now had a gape to remembered light.
 I smiled to nobody's know, I listened.

The professor talks of evolution. Life from
 a sparked speck in the sea. I look at you
 in my bag, knowing the beginning, how it ended
 last time, what I am doing now.
 Confess what I believe.

"This world is not alone among worlds.
 This universe is a blooming garden.
 Seeds landed here, & took." Someone laughs.
 Maybe someone else listens. The Professor
 frowns & warns me of science learned
 from television, between the ads
 for sweets & beer.

I raise mine eyes to you, really, lay mine eyes
 upon you. Let you have my clothes,
 let them undress you into my grasp,
 will you into my breathing, kiss you
 into my insist, let you feed my breast
 feeding you, my love, my stupid mortal
 love, *ah*, now within me you see,
 not the girl who would fuck & be consumed
 by you, no, a star, *oh what a fucking*
supernova burst in your mind, a moment,
 just a moment. A garden. Seeds landed. Took.
 You shudder like a woman. Just. Like.

Tonight I sleep smiling with you in
 my arms, & in the morning wake
 to you studying my face.

"What rhymes with the moon?"
 I smile. Boop your little nose.
 "I don't know either."

xlvi. The World a Myth, a Light, a Shimmer

This world sexes up soft & close for a story,
 where the bones & chaos & blood
 might be aligned, dance a friendly tune,
 & so I mull what I am trying to do
 & how to make my need into a pleasing myth.

We find a typing machine in that old shop,
 & Boop dresses my hair long with flowers.
 I undress to write, offer myself plain
 to the Imp in the Moon, *help me to tell it,*
help me to sing it, make them heed.

We begin in the local park, where some
 sleep & others grow vegetables. Boop
 will not have me go naked for the weather,
 but I will make their men listen with little
 more in dress. I hold my sheaf in the cold
 sunlight, & begin to read the words.

“There is a cavern, far below the earth,
 many tunnels lead to it, & we find
 ourselves watching as many Creatures
 gather, sniff twice, wonder what music,
 what games this time?” I read words of these things
 I know in my heart, stronger, summoning.

“There is on the surface high above this cavern
 an Island, & within that Island a Woods,
 a Castle, a Tower, a Dancing Grounds, & a
 Gate. A Tangled Gate.” They listen,
 they gather. I have hardly begun to tell
 & yet more of them. Some for my breasts,
 loose among veils. Some because the words
 remember in them something. I read &
 read again what I have brought until Boop
 pulls me to rest in my chamber.

“They believe books, Princess. As much
 as you in that park.”
 I nod. Let there be books. In them
 I tell all of the stories I remember,
 describe every small friend I’ve loved &
 now miss.



They believe. Many of them. Would me
 tell many more stories. But something
 about it. Cruelty, dirt, war. Each sweeps
 his own front step. Someone paid
 tends the park where I still read.
 Many who listen still have no home.
 The Way of the Creatures is, to these devotees,
 a sweet candied dream.

I withdraw again. It matters. It doesn't.
 I have no more place among them to tend good
 anymore than their legends of suffering
 supermen & body-loathing gurus.

"You despair, Princess."
 "I am angry and helpless. We do nothing
 here. I've changed little with my hands,
 my voice, my beliefs."

I sleep, days, dreamless, until again
 the full moon, its delighted Imp.

Boop & I drink a tea of earth creatures,
 found in the park, I let my body
 accelerate by them, I take Boop's paw,
 him too, we travel the distance,
 the light soft & solid beneath our feet
 as we climb, to arrive, to arrive.

A mile & an inch high before us,
 a delighted, mocking smile at our visit,
 waiting, not waiting.

"Give me a useful word, imp," I command, ask.
 "Eh?" her look unknowing the world below
 & its words.
 "Just one," I say softly. Lift her in my hand,
 palm up, for her to snap & bite at.

"Nothing saves the world, this time
 or any other. Dreams are the salve
 for this."

Wait. *What?* She is staring at me, said
 these words? Turn palm down to dis-jaw.
 She cackles, high & low. Click-clicks &
 noise-noises. A face in my mind now,
 as she's shooping us away. Dreams the salve
 for failure. This man's face.
I will not accept this as enough.

xlvi. Orphans

Water, cold. Salt water, splashing.
 Choking to the surface, flailing.
 Another. There is another. We are
 together yet we can't help each other,
 except to begin to drown together.

A net. Tangled & dragged & choking
 suddenly both air & water & strong hands
 on us both, I feel her hand in mine
 for a moment. Squeeze. *We are saved.*
 Then we fall apart again as they take a look.

We are guised as girl children & they
 remember to cover us up. That look
 of wonder & loathing remains with me.
 From curiosity to greed as we are reckoned
 the King's prize. A reward. Other considerations.
 But two? They study us in our wet
 blankets & I find her hand again.
 She's more terrified than me. I breathe us
 together calm. *Breathe, sister. Breathe.*

We're bundled off to separate places
 on this old fishing boat. Another docks
 along side it that night. You were taken.
 You were terrified & taken from me.
I am so sorry. I remember now.

I being to wake, to cry out, but Boop
nuzzles me close, *Hmmms* deep into
my grasp, draws me back in. These
earth creatures are telling what
I should know. *There's more.*

Eventually I am clothed in more than
a wet blanket & the sniffs of me
remain no more. The King will have
his prize unmarked & we will have
our reward. Paltry compared to the
Travelers' gift, but his protection is more.

The ship lands on the Island as I have
been thrust into a small windowless room
to clean from a pot & dress in cut-down
clothes. I am transferred from one
tall set of weathered hands to smoother,
gentler ones. Still, the same wonder,
the same loathing. It is night when we
arrive & so I see little of where I've
come, where I shall long be.

At last, a room. A bedchamber. The door
closed behind me. There are soft clothes
on the bed but I push them aside &
simply strip down. I feel the salt water
still, deeper than bathing. I feel my sister's
hand. Her terror. I sit on this soft bed
& look about me at the shapes of a
princess's bedroom.

"I'm not a Princess," I say softly.

Toward dawn exhaustion softly takes
me under & I feel myself slipping back
deep into the waters, this time willing,
this time I know she's there.
We will go together.

A movement in the room. I withdraw
from waters & see there is something
about the wall opposite my bed.
I crawl, stumble toward it. A . . . hole?

An odd-shaped hole in the wall, big
 enough to let me crawl through.
 I do. Nude & unknowing as I am
 of all this, I crawl through that
 hole to the first of many tunnels.

The White Bunny. The many giraffes & bears.
 The crazy imp. *The turtle not a turtle.*
 “Boop!”
 “Yes, Princess?”
 “How does this help us? I’ll wake soon
 & all this long gone. How are the
 earth creatures helping?”
 “They brought me.”

I start & look. A big, heavy, bald-headed
 man. Leather covered in ink decorations & jewelry.
 Now I am not in the cavern & tunnels.
 Just this room. Schoolbooks. Pink cat radio.

He eyes me but not as a man. Humor,
 not wonder & loathing. “I’m Benny
 Big Dreams.”

Keeping held together, “I’m Iris.”
 “You’re the Princess.”
 “Yes. And no.”
 He laughs, good & fleshed out for a
 dream figure. “I’ll help you as I can.”

A sudden pound at the door. “Keep the sex noises
 down to a dull roar! Not everybody’s
 getting some!” I still my *Hmmm*,
 music to thank the earth creatures
 their gifts. *My sister. My path.*

xlix. Crossing New Worlds, Part 1

I don't see Benny Big Dreams again soon.
 My days are quiet. I go out again
 to the park, tending vegetables, my hands
 greedy to rake into the good cold soil.
 There are earth creatures nearby &
 this calms me too. They know this world
 well & remain cheerful despite all.

Sometimes men approach me. Lonely.
 Sad. Mostly, wanting. Looking at me &
 wanting more than I have or know to give.
 Moments, when they are deep inside me,
 I am able to do a little something. Heal a bit.
 Undo some of the fray. They pull out of me,
 wondering, sometimes scared. Measuring
 their cocks for possible loss.

It gets colder. I am not doing well.
 My body is worn from sadness,
 from the casual harm some men do me.
 I stop going out again.

"Princess."
 We are under all of our blankets.
 A thick brown one especially, covered
 in bear faces. Protecting us as they can.

"Princess!"
 "We have to find Benny."

Boop makes us a tea, brewed from the rest
 of the earth creatures we have, &
 he makes us both drink of them & chew them down.

"You're not well," says softly, breaking love.
 "We'll ask Benny," I say & hug him.

Benny likes us to find each other as though
 by chance in one tunnel or another.
 Annoyed but I look. This time he makes
 it harder.



“Benny! Benny Big Dreams!” My dream body
 & voice are fine & full & intimidating.
 He emerges, as though from rock. Bows,
 mocking. Wondering at what he is
 would lead me wondering what I am.
 I simply talk instead.

“I need your help.”
 He eyes me. “You’re stalled.”
 “Worse.”
 Nods. “What are you trying to do?”
 I start. Think. “The world is going to die
 again. I can’t let it.”
 He laughs. “Can’t you just save it again?
 A twitch of your comely nose?”
 “Yes. No. I’m not sure.”
 Now he’s serious. “You need to become sure.”
 “I don’t know what that means.”
 He stares me bluntly. “The world loses something
 in the saving. It’s a little weaker after.
 You can’t save it perpetually, even if you wanted.”

He speaks softly now. “You lose something
 in the saving too.”
 “*Just tell me*, Benny.” I feel Boop stiffen
 beside me, but say nothing.
 “What did the imp say to you?”
 “That the world can’t be saved. That dreams
 salve this failure.”
 I weaken a little & he holds me, lightly but
 protecting. “You don’t believe her.” I shake
 my head. “I can’t. There must be *something*.”

"Tell the stories again, Iris. But tell new ones, of a good place. Make it real as dreams are. Make it safe, for Creatures new & old.

"Creatures? But they live here, in these caves & tunnels."

He nods. "Yes, & in this new place you will create."

"Will I live there?"

"Do you wish it?"

"No. I can't. I can only live near. With Boop."

"There's more." His voice so gentle I am ready to cry aloud.

I nod.

"You'll let go living in this world for that one. Your powers will spend there to create but depart here."

"Will it help?"

He cackles softly, in reply.

xl. Crossing New Worlds, Part 2

I hesitate. I let days pass by.

There's more to do before letting go the world. *There must be.*

I am feeling a little better. Warmer days.

Boop has found me more earth creatures & medicine. I don't ask what. And it's only to keep me going for awhile. While I decide.

Then I find him, a new friend. He is a . . . little beagle puppy. I am asked to find him & take care of him.

"Where, Princess? Who is asking?" Boop's look is obvious.

I think. "She came to me in a dream.

She said 'find him & take care of him while I am gone.'" Boop nods, sighs.

Together we dress me in my old earth creatures shirt & dress, he flowers my hair like old, & we go out. Him not in my knapsack, though. I carry him in my arms, despite his worry.

We walk down to the park. A few
 of those living there remember my stories
 still. Smile at me. Would protect me if need be.
 I gave them something to keep.

Then on to the markets. To the toy store
 where I found Boop himself.

There. On an empty shelf. It's him.
 "Algernon," she told me he's called," I say
 to Boop. "But she calls him Sonnyboy."

We return to our room. He is new
 & scared but he feels among friends
 now. He calms.

Delaying, feeling stronger. I find a job.
 I begin to tend my battered body.
 It's hard to do & I do not heal fully,
 but there are a few months, I remember,
 even now, when we three lived together
 in that room.

We lived together & I would go to my job
 every day. I would leave Boop & Algernon
 in the window to watch the day &
 wait for my return. I would return
 in the evening, cook food, & they would
 tell me what they saw. The light
 passing differently on sunny & stormy
 days. Loud games in the street. The scents
 of wild berries & car exhaust. Tired faces,
 distracted & worried. They watched.

On Saturdays I would heap them into
 my knapsack, & go to the cinema.
 I would sneak Boop & Algernon into my lap &
 eat my chocolate & little sack of popcorn.
 For awhile, not a Princess nor a Saviour.
 Just three good friends.

After a few weekly visits, it seemed
 like it was the same film every week,
 which was strange. Stranger too is
 that the story advanced each time.

It was called **RemoteLand**. It began,
 sometimes, with a car crash, sometimes
 in reverse. Then it got stranger.
 The story shifted to an Island. A Kingdom.
 A tall Castle, a Tower, Dancing Grounds.

Then one week, a Gate. Telling *my story*
 though strangely with others peopling it.
 “Benny,” I growled.

He would not confess the film his doing.
 Just his usual nudgings for me to act.
 “Soon, Iris, *soon*.”

One day I did not go to work.
 I could not get out of my bed.
 Boop & Algernon clung to me with terror.

“OK, Benny,” I said aloud to the dark room,
 its dusty schoolbooks. Its long unplayed
 pink radio shaped like a cat.

Benny came for Algernon to bring him
 to the new place when it was time.
 “Trust me, Princess.” I had no choice as I let him go.

Boop & I huddled together, no force of dreams
 or nature would rent us. Earth creatures
 now filled my room since I was ready,
 & did not have to drink or eat them.
 We went together, letting go to make new,
letting go to make new.

I will see my sister again. *I will*
see Algernon again.

In this new place I create, I take
 a new name. I am Christina, sometimes
 Chrisakah. The maker. The creator.
 The guardian of another new land.
 Crissy, for short.

We leave that room behind & come
to this new place, where Boop & I
will dwell alone all of our days,
friends to & guardians of this other new place.

Our new home is green & hilly. The air is cool
& lovely. I wish my friends from the park
could live here in peace. But I have left them
with my trace & no further. Benny will gentle
their dreams sometimes, he promised me.

“There should be a Castle, Princess.”
I shake my head. “I’m not a Princess.
I never was.”

Boop stares me down despite his shortness
to my own. “A castle we will build
together. It can be . . . fun.”

“Fun?” I smile. Remember how.
“Like your stories. Rooms that come & go.
& visitors too.”
“From where?”
“From the new place you will help
to create.”

I nod. A Guardian who is
a Princess living in a Castle.
Boop will be my servant though I beg
him not to be. He is sure. This will work.

I am not alone as the days pass.
I live with Boop in our Castle.
No dancing grounds. No Gate.
It’s *all* Gate now. Benny cackles. The imp nods.

And so my story, from pieces I sometimes
remember & so this picture to view.
I call my new home Imagianna perhaps
with more hope that I have.



One fine day, the finest, the beagle
 comes to the new land I have helped
 to create. I learn it is called Bags End.
 I think of the Red Bags & nod.
 One day them too.

He doesn't remember me. Only who
 I took care of him for. His long-lost
 Mommy Beagle.

But he likes me & likes when I tell him
 stories. Likes it so much I arrange for
 my old typing machine to find its way
 into Bags End so that he can tell
 that place's new stories.

My bedchamber is the same as it was
 on the Island long ago. Boop sleeps
 in my grasp, as always.

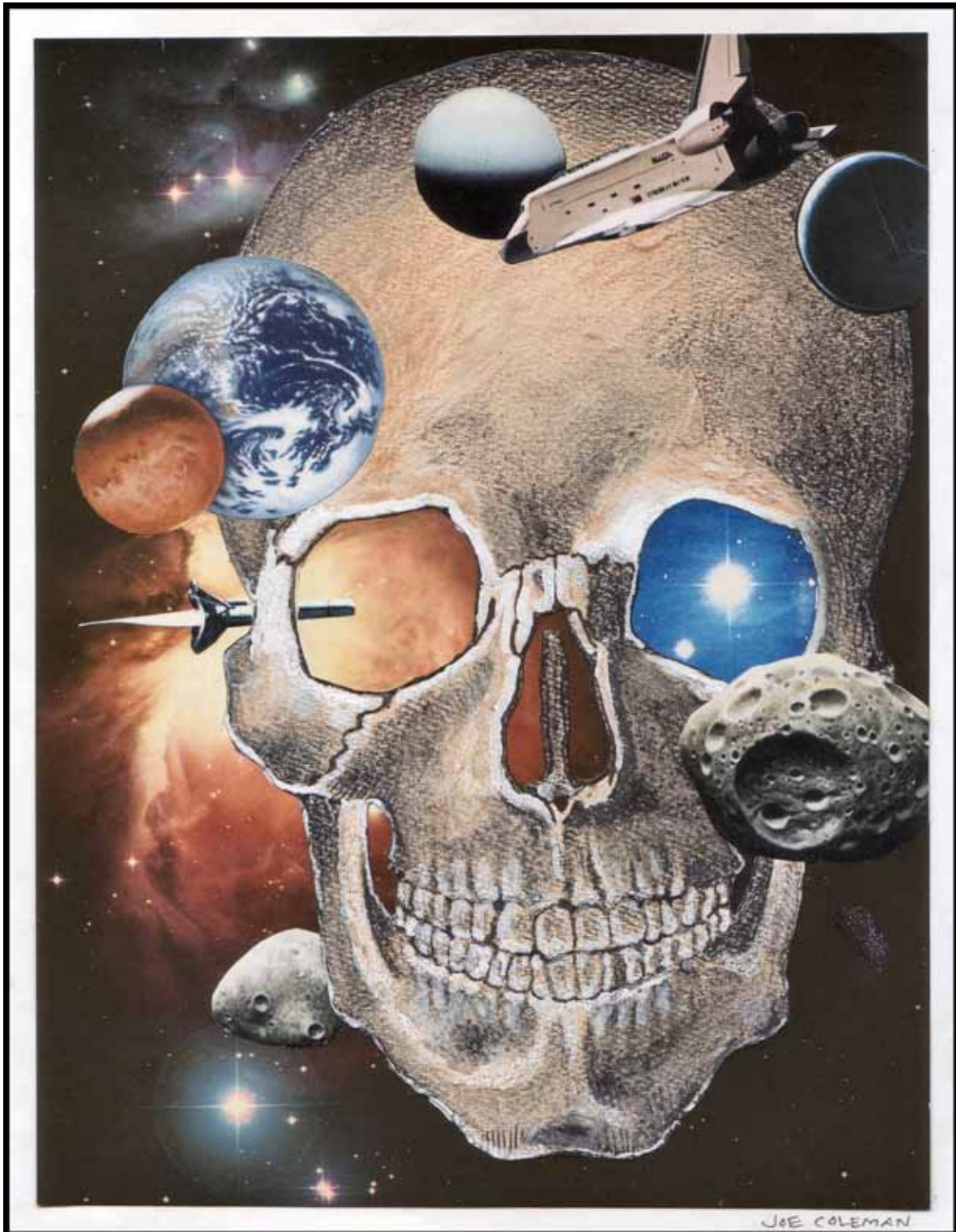
Sometimes I let us dream & find
 the old hole in the wall, & return
 again to the tunnels & cavern below
 the Tangled Gate. But it's only dreams,
 I know. Imagianna is where we are now.

*[Benny nods. Keeps his distance mostly.
 It's for the best. Nothing's gone. Nothing goes away.
 Nothing returns. He does not see in time,
 then & now & hence. All points connect.
 Not yet for Crissy to remember this.]*

*[But he knows her sister is still looking
 for her. Her sister has forgotten nothing.
 Her sister is nearing Imagianna
 all the time, no time, every time. Soon.]*



* * * * *



A.S. Kay



Psychedelics and Lucid Dreaming: Doorways in the Mind

[Essay]

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Psychedelics and lucid dreaming are doorways in the mind. Each can lead us to larger realities—often answering a deep need to explore the fundamental question: “What is reality?” Each shows us that reality is bigger, more complex, more varied, and stranger than normal consciousness can fathom.

With psychedelics and ordinary dreams we often jump into uncharted realms. How can we become adept at exploring these realms, and how can we travel further?

We know we can train our dream-minds. One clue to this is that humans have learned to navigate other altered states. In particular, there are maps of many means of meditative progress and many phenomena of meditative and psychedelic realities. And high-altered states are increasingly seen to be consistent with each other (psychedelics, dreams, meditation, spiritual emergence, out-of-body, and near-death experiences). So exposure to any of these helps us learn the others. In short, all are complementary techniques for delving deeply into our minds, and all are similar enough to confirm that these Other Worlds are larger realities rather than mere hallucinations.

Of these modes, dreams and their complements (daydreams and waking fantasies) are the mind’s most universal means of creating and experiencing important higher states of consciousness daily (or nightly). In fact, for our mental health, we each need to allow our mind to seek its symbolic home by these means, especially by dreaming.

What is the continuum of dreams? Ordinary dreams are known to all. In lucid dreaming you become aware that you are dreaming, and the dream world becomes numinous. If you choose to, you can alter your dream as it unfolds. In high dreams you dream that you take a psychedelic and have trip-like experiences. In high lucid dreams, of course, you combine the “pluses” of lucid dreams and high dreams: You know that you are dreaming, you intentionally dream that you take a psychedelic, and you have a drug-free psychedelic trip. Some high and high lucid dreams even continue for a time after waking up. In that state you cannot tell your reality from psychedelia, though you have not actually taken any psychedelic. (These reports complement those from Neuro-Linguistic training that psychedelic states can be induced by micro-modelling.)

Lucid dreaming has been popularized over the past decade or so. Best-known is the work of Dr. Stephen LaBerge, in particular his book *Lucid Dreaming*. Dr. Jayne Gackenbach publishes the *Lucidity Letter*, and lucid dreaming pioneers hold regular conferences that draw

people nationwide.

What dramatic realizations and transformations can occur on all these paths? Aldous Huxley expressed them extremely well as the Pure Light, the intensification of perception (especially color), and a deepening of meaning. The Pure Light has gradations from the absolute, intense light of God down through the spiritual realms reported by mystics and Scriptures. The intensification of color and other senses is well known to psychedelics users, and is far beyond ordinary experience. The deepening of meaning into ineffability is the subjective but totally unshakable experience that each object or image has absolute significance in and of itself, directly, and not merely symbolically.

Another hallmark of heightened consciousness is the suspension of disbelief. The most bizarre circumstances are accepted without question. While in everyday consciousness we judge things true or hallucinatory by whether they conform to physical laws, in heightened consciousness our minds often generate or receive chains of images that show us deeper connections and laws. Suppose a tree forms itself into a bellowing bullfrog, and the frog becomes a dragon. From higher consciousness we see this as a revelation of the inner nature of the tree, or of “treeness,” and its relation to the essence of frog and dragon, rather than as a violation of the law that trees stay trees and do not become frogs or dragons.

But these radically enhanced qualities of perception are not important for rapture or fascination alone. Their primary value is in the permanent qualitative changes they can and do make in people’s lives. Through such altered states people have healed themselves of physical and emotional trauma ranging from birth trauma to cancer to violent rape. They have boosted their creative awareness, both in art (gaining inspiration and direction for their creative ability) and science (bringing forth new theorems and inventions).

In dreams we have complete physical safety. With psychedelics there is safety in most contexts, but since the body is awake and mobile, perceptual shifts can cause danger. Thus in high lucid dreams, with an enhanced perceptual field and only our dream body active, we can safely explore otherwise dangerous or even fatal realms of behavior. This can be accomplished either by taking control of the dream and directing its flow, or by allowing it to unfold and teach us as we remain in a passive student role. Both options are valid and valuable in different contexts, dependent on the dream-tripper’s psychological state and the nature of the material that manifests.

Another very useful thing to do in lucid and high lucid dreams is to rehearse our behavior and choices in difficult circumstances, and allow our mind to generate possible results. In this way we can pre-test our waking choices, much as athletes improve their performance by mental practice.

Because the dream and psychedelic states allow us to see underlying patterns that generate and govern our negative behaviors, all lucid dreams also can be used to recognize and release our fears and negativity, and to modify our psychological foundations so that we can choose new and more positive behaviors. In fact, a good deal of the denial and hysteria that surround psychedelics and “bad dreams” is rooted in the fear of, and the unconscious recognition of the power of, the psychological and psychic aspects of dreaming. But growth usually comes when we face our fears, and we should welcome any path that offers the opportunity for such work and play.

In addition, it has been suggested by spiritual masters that dreams are an excellent place to work out karmic patterns. There we can deal with our deep negative issues without turning

them into violence, disease, and tragedy in the physical world. For example, such dreams should allow us to work through grief without turning it into cancer. Such ideas have recently received support from experiments that show brainwave activity to be the same for waking and dreaming a given task. This seems to indicate that, to the human consciousness, the two types of experiences are equivalent. While such theories remain somewhat speculative, we are far better off learning to use them as though they are proven, than waiting all our lives for more proof and perhaps bypassing the chance to grow and transform.

Another advantage of lucid dreaming is that it is one hundred percent healthy, legal, and free. Dr. Stanislav Grof remarked that, after having to turn from psychedelics to holotropic breathing to help people reach high states of consciousness, at least they can't outlaw breathing. Well, dreaming can't be outlawed either.

You can train yourself to recall dreams, do "dreamwork," and then learn higher forms of dreaming. How do you train yourself? By regular practices which I will describe. And if you have had psychedelic experiences, that is a great advantage because it has given you very powerful "track time" in the alternate realities you can reach.

The general technique is to train yourself progressively to recall dreams, to do dreamwork, and then to reach successive states of lucidity.

There are dozens of fine books for self-training in dream recall and dreamwork. Any sizeable New Age bookstore is likely to have many of them, and all the current ones are listed in *Books in Print* for ordering through most bookstores. My suggestion is that you leaf through several and pick whichever feels right to you. And I suggest that rather than "studying" the book or making learning a chore, you read a chapter, or part of a chapter, each evening just before sleeping. Then invite your mind to give you the type of dream you have just read about. You will find that your unconscious mind is eager to communicate with you, and as you invite dreams, and begin your dream log, it will begin giving you many more dreams, and richer dreams. The process of learning lucidity will then be a continuation of this process.

The same pertains to dreamwork. Don't begin with "heavy" interpretations, like Freudian texts, that may bog you down or may emphasize mental illness or pathology. Instead, start with one of the lighter approaches, like Senoi or Jungian-Senoi dreamwork, which emphasize "speaking the dream" by telling it in the first person present tense ("I am") as though you are, successively, each of several major symbols that appeared in the dream. "I am" is a powerful affirmation, in dreamwork, psychology, and spirituality.

Keep a dream log, to record at least the most important dreams of each week. Certainly write down all pre-lucid, lucid, and high-lucid experiences to further validate these in your mind.

This initial training process will take most people several weeks to several months, depending on their psychological makeup and motivation. Within several months most neophytes will have at least a first lucid dream, and most lucid dreamers will substantially increase their lucidity.

To regularly reach transcendent levels via dreams, psychedelics, or other tools, however, also requires long-term psychological and spiritual clearing. If we are not clear we give priority to clearing the issues that dog us, whereas if we are clear we find lucidity far easier and more prevalent. But this operates as a two-way street; lucidity can help us dissolve issues. Dreamwork is therapeutic—at no cost.

Many people reach transcendent states at least once in their lives, but to make the

level of ultimate unity one's "home," rather than a one-time gift of divine grace, requires sustained intention, clearing, and practice. This can be gained via meditation, dreamwork, and psychedelics, or more easily by a combination of these and other modalities.

Here is a summary of how to learn to have high lucid dreams. It follows the helpful and informative step-by-step instructions in LaBerge's *Lucid Dreaming*, which he calls the MILD technique. Briefly, the MILD technique consists of two phases: Reality testing and dream programming.

Begin as described above, with dream recall, a dream log, and dreamwork, practicing with ordinary dreams as well as any pre-lucid or lucid dreams you may have. This sets your mind to focus more energy and awareness toward lucidity.

Simultaneously begin reality testing, by developing the habit of checking several times a day to determine if you are really awake or are dreaming. The idea is that what you steep yourself in during the day is eventually transferred to your dreams at night. If you habituate yourself to asking "How do I know I'm not dreaming?" then sooner or later you will ask this in a dream, and the answer will pop you into lucidity. In fact, the ease with which you adopt this reality testing will generally correlate to the ease with which you will learn to dream lucidly.

In addition to asking this question, you must *do* something to check it out. Never answer, "I just know." Among the most commonly used tests are:

1. Jumping up and trying to float.
2. Changing the color of something in the environment.
3. Reading something twice (digital clocks are excellent) and seeing if the text changes radically.
4. Seeing if there is anything odd in the environment, such as floating objects or body changes.

The second part of the MILD technique is to program yourself as you fall asleep by using an affirmation like "As I begin to dream I will realize I am dreaming" or "If I can see anything at all, I am dreaming." Repeat this as you fall asleep, and again as you re-enter sleep each time you awaken during the night.

Most people have at least one lucid dream within a few months of doing this practice religiously, and many begin lucid dreaming within two to four weeks. People who have had lucid dreams before training often can have two to four lucid dreams some nights after training. The strongest dreamers can train themselves to dream lucidly on command. There is some correlation between normal dream recall and lucid dreams, in both number and vividness.

Vitamin B6 will greatly increase the frequency and intensity of dreams. It will not necessarily influence the positive or negative content of dreams, however, so you may have both more positive dreams and more nightmares. Nightmares can be especially valuable, though—remember, it's better to have the experience in dreams than in waking life. So do dreamwork with them.

What do you do when you reach the Other Worlds? In my own experience, anything you like. I've found it most valuable to do whatever I would do in a waking psychedelic trip to increase my awareness, achieve new insights, reach spiritual realms, heal myself, and increase my psychological integration. Certainly unlimited free travel is instantly available. On the spiritual path, I seek an ally or guide or teacher, and may become their initiate. Several people have reported that killing your dream body leads to transcendence and is free from

risk. Looking at one's hands is a favorite "Don Juan" exercise that builds spiritual discipline. Accessing the archetypes and becoming them can be a powerful insight and healing tool.

A particularly "psychedelic" way of programming your choice is to decide which dream drug to take in a lucid state. If you take dream MDMA you will have a heart-level bonding experience, which can be used to clear negative patterns with parents, lovers, or friends, or to enhance awareness of the perfection of your self, and every other person. If you take dream LSD you can more easily tune into the unconscious realms and the spiritual channels, etc. You might even try creating your own brand of psychedelic, with attributes of your fancy. If you are really daring, take a totally unknown drug, and let it take you where it will. Everything you learn will mirror your mind! You will reach totally new and uncharted lands, which are yet somehow familiar!

Speculative and science fiction stories also offer good ideas for compounding your dream drug. In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley introduced Soma, a drug of his invention named after the early Aryan psychedelic soma. This was twenty-three years before he experienced a real psychedelic. Late in his life, in *Island*, he introduced Moksha as a utopian drug. Time warpers would be drugs that dilate or contract time, or allow time travel to past and future lives. Or take a stripper drug that peels away layer after layer of whatever you want to see reveal its deeper essence—so dream a mirror and fall into your core! Or design a transference drug that allows you to be fully in another's mind, or an alien consciousness. Of course there are all manner of telepathy-enhancing drugs you could conjure, as well as dream tripmates to play with. The list is as endless as your fantasy world, and as deep as your calling.

Here are a few of the high lucid experiences reported by *Psychedelic Monographs and Essays* readers, with commentary on their applicability to the spiritual path and the mapping of inner consciousness. They are transcribed in the first person, as each was dreamed.

High Lucid Dream #1: Healthiness

I am at a health fair where eight different types of psychedelics are being advertised and sold openly at a booth. I decide to try MDMA. Then I dream that I remember that I tried this substance last year in a similar dream but had forgotten I had it until now. As I get high, I like MDMA's gentle effects, and definitely notice them as I walk around at the health fair for a few hours. I have a very strange, very mellow feeling, different from any other psychedelic.

The dreamer had never really had a prior MDMA dream, and had not yet used MDMA in waking life. Shortly after this dream he did try it and found the experience to be very similar. In addition, the psychedelic appears in the context of a health fair, a place where self-improvement is the central purpose. With a little further conscious input, the dreamer could then choose to explore healthiness and perhaps self-healing, especially with love. Or he could heal a relationship, by interacting with someone in the dream. These are the strongest attributes of MDMA.

High Lucid Dream #2: Transpersonal and Precognitive

I awaken in a dreamscape of small buildings, perhaps out in the countryside. It is a schoolroom and also becomes a boat. I ask for a taste of the "Water of Life," and am led to a barrel-like metal cooler. I sit next to a woman as the boat begins to pull out. In the distance is the Golden Gate Bridge, and I tell the woman, "I am from earth" and ask, "What is the name of your

world?” She replies “Womb World.” Or “The Womb Mother.”

The “Water of Life” is a very powerful psychedelic drug described in *Dune*, a science fiction novel by Frank Herbert. It has strong mystical powers and permanently transforms the taker into a spiritual leader of the society, if she survives. It is only permitted to women. This dream clearly deals with integration of the feminine on the archetypal level. Both the psychedelic and the boat deal with the water element, archetypal representation of the feminine. And of course the alien woman from the Womb World is an even stronger female archetype. The bridge, being golden and numinous, speaks of both transformation and spirituality.

In addition to the normal symbolic dreamwork level, there was a strong precognitive aspect to this dream, as the dreamer was planning to attend a workshop by Stan and Christina Grof on holotropic breathing, which often precipitates participants into birthing and perinatal experiences. In fact Christina is a powerful woman whose first two transpersonal experiences were during the birthing of her children. Perhaps the dreamer was tuning into the imminent potential of a “birthing” into a higher spiritual world. When he attended the actual workshop, he also noticed that the cooler which appeared in the dream was directly outside the building where the workshop was held.

High Dream #3: Spiritual Perception

I partake of the Holy Bread in my old room at my parents’ house. Moving through a black and white world, I go down the stairs and step out the front door. Color flashes in. I stand at the steps of the porch and feel the air and hear thunder. Lightning flashes and I am high. Mrs. Miller’s house vanishes. I can see the river. The colors are all askew. Sheets of neon green rain fall under the iridescent navy blue trees, wildly writhing in the storm-tossed air.

On the ruby-red road the rain collects in pearly puddles and splashes dancing pink drops. I run in the warm rain, laughing as lightning bursts brilliant purple. I jump into the middle of the road, where four women, my grandmother, aunt, and two cousins are sitting at a table. I stop to say hello. At first they look normal, but their eyes have a strange inner light. They grab me. They are possessed. Their faces suddenly transform into horrifying apparitions. Their faces shrink and their hair, mouth, nostrils, and ears disappear, and their skin is the color of light rose marble replete with veins. Their eyes are giant purple raisins.

I become lucid, and know I’m dreaming. I try to twist free and run, but they won’t let me go. I say, “I can do all things through the power of Christ.” I do a backwards somersault and awaken.

In this dream, the dreamer takes the psychedelic before becoming lucid, but it is a nightmare. When he becomes lucid, and still high, he calls on the spiritual power of Christ to free him from the terror, and it works. The dreamer reports that in waking life, his cousins are “born again Christians” while he is Buddhist. A precursor to the religious content can be found in his initial statement that the dream drug taken was Holy Bread, a sacrament and a Christian one at that. Even so, he was surprised to find himself using the Christ symbol to reach freedom (and indeed doing a back-flip—a shift in position). Upon waking, he related the dream to an integration of the question of good and evil as

portrayed across seemingly incompatible religions.

He also affirms that this was the singularly most powerful psychedelic experience he has had in terms of the color negative shift, although no psychedelic was used in waking life. This indicates that such states can be naturally occurring brain/mind states if we can learn new modalities for accessing them.

Although psychedelics have been widely used for millennia in spiritual contexts, as have lucid dreams, it is only recently that the two areas have come to public attention and public availability on a wide scale. Research into the overlap of these two powerful transformational modalities is in its infancy, and an endlessly fascinating exploration lies ahead.

As more people train themselves to dream lucidly, the foundation for high lucid dreamwork becomes stronger. We hope to build a positive morphogenetic field around the ability to do lucid dreaming, so that more people can easily access this ecstatic state and all the higher states of consciousness it can lead to.

* * * * *





Tom Sheehan**Hermit Island, Maine**

I walked in night's syrup down a Hermit Island
road, caught between snoring and 3 A.M. loving,
 waiting for the fish to wake. I felt the heat
of stars and sand's abrasives, the mad interplay
of elements thrusting at moccasins and eyes.

 Ahead, the moon pushed light's broad blade
down through the perfection of trees, a leaf
scattered delight, a late moth struggled toward
 the infinities. I drank my beer, remembering
a starfish caught hours before on a burst of rocks,
its five fingers searching, as my senses did,
 for momentary salvation. I realized I had no
enemies, I had no hate. I moved out, into, and was
alone, with the grace of stars and the glitter of sand.

* * *

Two Ways of Looking at Teddie Boy

1.

Nothing can grab this old soldier as much as seeing
Teddie Boy, pilot, warrior, hitter, stealing the thunder
of the All-Star Game, Fenway Park, the year 2000,
and recalling with vivid clarity of a mind set that can
never move, the day, the hour, the temperature, the way
the sun slashed into a whitened valley in Korea in 1951,
and the artillery's Forward Observer, in a hole with me,
saying of the Marine flight strafing over us, out in front
of us, bugging down the valley only after every round of
ammunition was spent, "That's Ted Williams and his gang."

2.

Eyes, wrists, stubbornness, all put together in one machine,
and you rode that little pill over my head behind the bullpen
sucking on Budweiser; and that other machine, winged, blue-
borne, high over a Korean hill where I sucked on my guts
and dreamed of the tarp being pulled back on the infield
on a cloudy day, one day soon.

* * *

Sugaring

My father hid his diabetes
in black shoe tops. At night
he peeled off bloody socks
where veins went short circuiting.

My mother bought white cotton
socks by the dozens, band aid
throwaways after work or Sunday
best, after his heart pumped

its way down long lean legs
deep Nicaraguan paths had known,
every baseball diamond Boston
shook under red August skies,

who-knows-what in Shanghai.
Later on it went topsy-turvy
in eyeballs' secret caves,
refracting light into bones,

porous humors going to sponge,
into space where ideas lose out.
When he sat to peel his socks
from their red-wounding rounds,

checking the salvage of the day
like a crow beside the macadam,
or thumbbed a brailed king of
hearts or a diamond five

before he pegged me off the board,
I used to congratulate myself
for not saying anything to him.
He'd shuck off such words just

as he would an uncomfortable
compliment: they paid nothing,
they did nothing, they sat on the
ear like old, old promises.

Just piles of junk, he'd say,
the letter of vocabularies
and sore intentions. Even now
at cribbage or haberdashery,

seeing apod men humbled to knee,
clothesline flush with socks
as if a semaphore is working,
I remember how he crossed one

leg over the other, fingered
a sock, slowly peeled the skin
away from his angry feet,
casting off evening's surrender flag,

like an Indian,
godless,
from his coals.

* * *

Smile, Tuesday May Be a Day Too Late

Greet dawn each day as if a lost friend's come home;
 Make one and only one promise to yourself
 That you will enjoy the day and all it brings;
 Find in yourself the one extra ounce of reserve
 When you need it, and you will, for each day
 Demands energy as well as love;

Smile and say hello every day to at least one stranger;
 Acknowledge the joy of children and the peace
 That elders deserve; be as free with compliments
 As you are with your criticism; bite your tongue
 On the first harsh word you want to say;

Shake hands as if you were a link in a lifeline;
 Once in a while give something away
 That's important to you, but not a dream;
 Recall your parents' faces and a childhood incident,
 And remember their touch, their kiss,
 Their hand on you;

Retire with a smile to the joy of your rest,
 Knowing tomorrow is at hand; and above all,
 Grasp your dream as if it had handles,
 For you are the only one who can turn it around.

* * * * *





After Paradise

Don't run anymore. Quiet. How softly it rains
 On the roofs of the city. How perfect
 All things are. Now, for the two of you
 Waking up in a royal bed by a garret window.
 For a man and a woman. For one plant divided
 Into masculine and feminine which longed for each other.
 Yes, this is my gift to you. Above ashes
 On a bitter, bitter earth. Above the subterranean
 Echo of clamorings and vows. So that now at dawn
 You must be attentive: the tilt of a head,
 A hand with a comb, two faces in a mirror
 Are only forever once, even if unremembered,
 So that you watch what is, though it fades away,
 And are grateful every moment for your being.
 Let that little park with greenish marble busts
 In the pearl-gray light, under a summer drizzle,
 Remain as it was when you opened the gate.
 And the street of tall peeling porticos
 Which this love of yours suddenly transformed.

* * *

Café

Of those at the table in the café
 where on winter noons a garden of frost glittered on windowpanes
 I alone survived.
 I could go in there if I wanted to
 and drumming my fingers in a chilly void
 convoke shadows.

With disbelief I touch the cold marble,
 with disbelief I touch my own hand.
 It—is, and I—am in ever novel becoming,
 while they are locked forever and ever
 in their last word, their last glance,
 and as remote as Emperor Valentinian
 or the chiefs of the Massagetes, about whom I know nothing,
 though hardly one year has passed, or two or three.

I may still cut trees in the woods of the far north,
 I may speak from a platform or shoot a film
 using techniques they never heard of.
 I may learn the taste of fruits from ocean islands
 and be photographed in attire from the second half of the century.
 But they are forever like busts in frock coats and jabots
 in some monstrous encyclopedia.

Sometimes when the evening aurora paints the roofs in a poor street
 and I contemplate the sky, I see in the white clouds
 a table wobbling. The waiter whirls with his tray
 and they look at me with a burst of laughter
 for I still don't know what it is to die at the hand of man,
 they know—they know it well.

* * *

Bypassing rue Descartes

I descended toward the Seine, shy, a traveler,
 A young barbarian just come to the capital of the world.

We were many, from Jassy and Koloshvar, Wilno and Bucharest, Saigon and Marrakesh,
 Ashamed to remember the customs of our homes,
 About which nobody here should ever be told:
 The clapping for servants, barefooted girls hurry in,
 Dividing food with incantations,
 Choral prayers recited by master and household together.

I had left the cloudy provinces behind,
 I entered the universal, dazzled and desiring.

Soon enough, many from Jassy and Koloshvar, or Saigon or Marrakesh
 Would be killed because they wanted to abolish the customs of their homes.

Soon enough, their peers were seizing power
 In order to kill in the name of the universal, beautiful ideas.

Meanwhile the city behaved in accordance with its nature,
 Rustling with throaty laughter in the dark,
 Baking long breads and pouring wine into clay pitchers,
 Buying fish, lemons, and garlic at street markets,
 Indifferent as it was to honor and shame and greatness and glory,
 Because that had been done already and had transformed itself
 Into monuments representing nobody knows whom,
 Into arias hardly audible and into turns of speech.

Again I lean on the rough granite of the embankment,
 As if I had returned from travels through the underworlds
 And suddenly saw in the light the reeling wheel of the seasons
 Where empires have fallen and those once living are now dead.

There is no capital of the world, neither here nor anywhere else,
 And the abolished customs are restored to their small fame
 And now I know that the time of human generations is not like the time of the earth.

As to my heavy sins, I remember one most vividly:
 How, one day, walking on a forest path along a stream,
 I pushed a rock down onto a water snake coiled in the grass.

And what I have met with in life was the just punishment
 Which reaches, sooner or later, the breaker of a taboo.

* * *

With Her

Those poor, arthritically swollen knees
 Of my mother in an absent country.
 I think of them on my seventy-fourth birthday
 As I attend early Mass at St. Mary Magdalen in Berkeley.
 A reading this Sunday from the Book of Wisdom
 About how God has not made death
 And does not rejoice in the annihilation of the living.
 A reading from the Gospel according to Mark
 About a little girl to whom He said: "Talitha, cumi!"
 This is for me. To make me rise from the dead
 And repeat the hope of those who lived before me,
 In a fearful unity with her, with her pain of dying,
 In a village near Danzig, in a dark November,
 When both the mournful Germans, old men and women,
 And the evacuees from Lithuania would fall ill with typhus.
 Be with me, I say to her, my time has been short.
 Your words are now mine, deep inside me:
 "It all seems now to have been a dream."

* * *



I Sleep a Lot

I sleep a lot and read St. Thomas Aquinas
 or *The Death of God* (that's a Protestant book).
 To the right the bay as if molten tin,
 beyond the bay, city, beyond the city, ocean,
 beyond the ocean, ocean, till Japan.
 To the left dry hills with white grass,
 beyond the hills an irrigated valley where rice is grown,
 beyond the valley, mountains and Ponderosa pines,
 beyond the mountains, desert and sheep.

When I couldn't do without alcohol, I drove myself on alcohol,
 When I couldn't do without cigarettes and coffee, I drove myself on cigarettes and coffee.
 I was courageous. Industrious. Nearly a model of virtue.
 But that is good for nothing.

Please, Doctor, I feel a pain.
 Not here. No, not here. Even I don't know.
 Maybe it's too many islands and continents,
 unpronounced words, bazaars, wooden flutes,
 or too much drinking to the mirror, without beauty,
 though one was to be a kind of archangel
 or a Saint George, over there, on St. George Street.

Please, Medicine Man, I feel a pain.
 I always believed in spells and incantations.
 Sure, women have only one, Catholic, soul,
 but we have two. When you start to dance
 you visit remote pueblos in your sleep
 and even lands you have never seen.
 Put on, I beg you, charms made of feathers,
 now it's time to help one of your own.
 I have read many books but I don't believe them.
 When it hurts we return to the banks of certain rivers.

I remember those crosses with chiseled suns and moons
 and wizards, how they worked during an outbreak of typhus.
 Send your second soul beyond the mountains, beyond time.
 Tell me what you saw, I will wait.

* * *

Gift

A day so happy.
 Fog lifted early, I worked in the garden.
 Hummingbirds were stopping over honeysuckle flowers.
 There was no thing on earth I wanted to possess.
 I knew no one worth my envying him.
 Whatever evil I had suffered, I forgot.
 To think that once I was the same man did not embarrass me.
 In my body I felt no pain.
 When straightening up, I saw the blue sea and sails.

* * *

Pastels by Degas

That shoulder. An erotic thing submerged in duration.
 Her hands are entangled in undone plaits of red hair
 So dense that, combed, it pulls, the head down,
 A thigh, and under it the foot of another leg.
 For she is sitting, her bent knees open,
 And the movement of her arm reveals the shape of a breast.
 Here undoubtedly. In a century, a year
 That have vanished entirely. How to reach her?
 And how to reach the other in her yellow robe?
 She puts on mascara, humming a song.
 The third lies on the bed, smokes a cigarette,
 And looks through a fashion journal. Her muslin shirt
 Shows a white roundness and pinkish nipples.
 The painter's hat hangs on the entresol
 With their dresses. He liked to stay here, chatting,
 Sketching. Our human communion has a bitter taste
 Because of the familiarity of touch, of avid lips,
 The shape of loins, and talk of an immortal soul.
 It flows and recedes. A wave, a sighing of surf.
 And only a red mane flickered in the abyss.

* * *

Anka

In what hat, from what epoch,
 Is Anka posing in the photograph,
 Above her brow the wing of a killed bird?
 Now she is one of them, beyond the threshold
 Where there are no men, no women,
 And the prophet does not give separate sermons
 To the ones covered with shawls
 So that their long hair does not provoke lust,
 And to the tanned, bearded men in draped burnouses.
 Saved from the furnaces of World War II,
 Trying on dresses in reflected mirrors
 And blouses and necklaces and rings,
 With a hairstyle and makeup for the wars of her career,
 Happy to go to bed or just talk over wine,
 The owner of a beautiful apartment, full of sculpture.
 Left to herself till the end of the world,
 How does she manage now, fleshless?
 And what could the prophet find to say, when he has no thought
 Of the hair under a shawl and the secret
 Fragrance of skin and of ointments?

* * *

If There is No God

If there is no God,
 Not everything is permitted to man.
 He is still his brother's keeper
 And he is not permitted to sadden his brother,
 By saying that there is no God.

* * *

This World

It appears that it was all a misunderstanding.
 What was only a trial run was taken seriously.
 The rivers will return to their beginnings.
 The wind will cease in its turning about.
 Trees instead of budding will tend to their roots.
 Old men will chase a ball, a glance in the mirror—
 They are children again.
 The dead will wake up, not comprehending.
 Till everything that happened has unhappened.
 What a relief! Breathe freely, you who suffered much.

* * *

Faith

Faith is in you whenever you look
 At a dewdrop or a floating leaf
 And know that they are because they have to be.
 Even if you close your eyes and dream up things
 The world will remain as it has always been
 And the leaf will be carried by the waters of the river.

You have faith also when you hurt your foot
 Against a sharp rock and you know
 That rocks are here to hurt our feet.
 See the long shadow that is cast by the tree?
 We and the flowers throw shadows on the earth.
 What has no shadow has no strength to live.

* * *

Hope

Hope is with you when you believe
The earth is not a dream but living flesh,
That sight, touch, and hearing do not lie,
That all things you have ever seen here
Are like a garden looked at from a gate.

You cannot enter. But you're sure it's there.
Could we but look more clearly and wisely
We might discover somewhere in the garden
A strange new flower and an unnamed star.

Some people say we should not trust our eyes,
That there is nothing, just a seeming,
These are the ones who have no hope.
They think that the moment we turn away,
The world, behind our backs, ceases to exist,
As if snatched up by the hands of thieves.

* * * * *

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Part Nine

xxxi.

A nudge in his side. Another. Now a jab. Bowie starts awake but opens his eyes only slowly. A light sniff. Her. Not the other one. Or one to come.

She smiles sidelong at him, not one to be caught distracted from the Architect's class.

The readings are long, especially when he'd prefer be studying the texts himself. But no, the texts are fragile. More than that, the readers derive power from their readings. The words, & who delivers them.

Preacher hadn't liked it, he was protective of Bowie no matter that they had been on several cases now.

"Why aren't you coming then?"

Preacher laughed. "He would know it was me in two snaps. If that."

"Are you enemies?"

He sighs. Looks sad. "No. He was my old partner."

"I don't understand . . ."

"No. You don't. That's part of why you're going. Much as I dislike it, you can find things out & figure them out in a way nobody else can."

"Think I'm going to prefer him?"

Bowie meant fun but Preacher glared. "I'll tell you this much, Garrish. You won't come back easy, or fully."

Nudge, nudge. He sniffs again, right down to her lack of underwear beneath that dull uniform. Wants to, doesn't think Preacher would like it. Doesn't want to enough to rebel. At least yet.

The Architect is tall, too tall somehow. The classroom isn't well-lighted, which probably is for mood, but just makes Bowie want to nap.

The Architect strides among the rows of cross-legged students.

“We learn these myths not to take them literally, but to see how the Gate’s story has lived among men for all his centuries. Whatever their verifiable truths, they matter as stories.”

His look at Bowie is direct. “It has taken a long time to understand the Gate, what its power is & has been always. To figure what we can & should do.”

“Now each of you is shown the origin of the world, its source in Emandia, & how arrives the Gate to the Island. Now each of you is given practice to devote to your art, time to feel *how real it seems through the Dreaming*.”

Pauses. Nods. “It wasn’t always so. We lost many, in mind or entirely, early on, thinking it would be quick. We knew so much, the Hum that signaled the Gate through time, the juice created to pursue it. We could piece together the fall.”

Continues. Bowie is fully awake to this. “We believed it was a series of acts, a *finite* number, they could be shifted, like levers, like Time itself a great calculating machine we could tinker to a better end. We would find these acts, in space & time, & settle one of our sleepers near each one.”

Returns to his low podium, upon which his text sits. Kneels, talks on. “*But what happened was that the Hum shifted*. The Gate eluded us & we could not use its power to repair our history. We found ourselves at war with the Gate, losing men & women, helpless to know how to prevent our collapse.”

Tenses more as he tells. “I sought our answer dream within dream within dream. Eschewed the Sleeping Capsule, trebled in strength the potion I myself had contrived. I slept beyond reason & stayed beyond the Dreaming to my mortal danger.” Pauses. Nods. Talks.

“It was my old mutt, Asterius, who saved me. I’d retreated to my Tower offices to do this desperate work, & finally he would not be so long kept from me. He found me & nudged me & licked me & dragged me back to him.”

“Asterius? Not Fido or Rover?” The class laughs. The Architect at least takes a breath before continuing.

“I held him despairing. His quick breaths, his swift heartbeat. How he tended me close like in other times I had cared for his wounds & ills. And then I realized what should have been simple.”

He stands, fully, tall, overly tall. “*History is the stuff of blood & bone. Save its body.*”

Looks at each of us. Slowly, thoroughly. “The Gate is history’s heartbeat. It could not save the flesh within which it lives. We had to learn what had been broken & figure a manner to heal it. This was be our way going forward.” A fist in his hand. “Bind the wounds.” Pound. “Tend the wounds.” Pound! “Heal the wounds.”

He's tired now. But had to tell. "The days & weeks & months went on. I saw human history heal but not recover. It's not enough."

His voice a whisper. "I now wonder if there is something else. A potenter magic to be seduced.

"I wonder if the Hum is a thread back through time, can this be? Travel it to what Emandia was, what we are."

The whole room is still to receive these words. He concludes quite simply. "I would go myself, if needed, as sacrifice or Hero. *We cannot fail.*"

Nothing more is said. The Architect wordless, motionless. They leave uncertainly.

xxxii.

Bowie is laying sleepless in his Capsule when a soft noise & she crawls in. Not forbidden but disapproved. Multiple loyalties don't work, so best make it a body's carnal feeding & little more.

This girl holds him, presses him, like she's cold. Bowie pulls the Capsule's lid fully shut & dims the interior lights.

"We don't have to. It's just his words really spooked me." Her voice soft in his ear rouses him quicker than he could have imagined.

(Is it silence or is it song when it begins? The world, the next one, the countless next one, blue-green, another ocean planet, waiting to fire, waiting to bloom, waiting to burst)

He moves for her face, next to it, nuzzles his cheek with hers, finds her hands, twines them in his, holds her a long time, slowing her beat & breath a little, synching

(But then the Hum, the arrival, just barely not silence itself, & yet, & yet. Low singing, so low, searching music, searching this new watery planet, sniffing like a Creature for the place to arrive, the place will sing to be the Tangled Gate)

Her clothes are easy to shift off, & his sniff yes nothing underneath. Her fear & a lust she's new to feeling rival in her, & lust always wins that contest—

(Arrives the Island, a Beast covered in trees, arrives & sings the Island, sings it soft, sings it promise, sings it lure, accept the Gate, Accept the Gate, Accept the Gate. The Island will growl, demur, beckon, let a little, let a little)

Pushes his head upon her breasts, hard, bite, bite, now lower, lower, there, your tongue, your teeth, fire me, fire me deeply, my flesh is prime for you, I will not spend easy, ah yes, & again, yess, & again, & fucking again

(Sing the Island a vision, a vision of what to be, what will emerge this union from new & old dreams, sing the Island a vision honest of old despair, what has failed, whyfor this new song. Sing the Island till the Island pleases no more, & love fires this universe once & future again)

She wants him atop her, hands squeezing her breasts as he enters her, her hips moving slow, faster, slow, letting him in deeper, more deeply than he has before, more deeply than he knew how with a girl

(Now comes the Gate, comes the Gate, comes the Gate now full & hard, sings unto the Island, arriving, arriving, mating, binding, let a little, let a little more. Grasping, binding, joy)

They moan together, moan into each other, their bodies moan into each other, she drinks him in, & deeper, & deeper, he wishes he could tell her, quietly, as they lay in each other's sweaty, sweaty arms. Why can't he tell her?

(Now a conjugal song, happy wedded *Hummmmmmm*. The Gate grafted to the beauties of this Island, to the new truths of this world. The Gate crafted to sing through time, love every last Creature of this world. Every last one)

They don't again, not even once. She wants to ask, fears the answer. Broods. Despairs. One morning, someone new in her Capsule. More likely she left than was expelled.

Bowie can't yet. It's too soon. Yet her departure hurts him, makes him want to go before he is ready. Just go. *And go*.

He would follow the Architect, or try to. Was this his mission? Did Preacher know the Architect's intent to follow the Hum backwards through time?

xxxiii.

What found on the Island, who came to the Island, how the dreams of men fired through it all.

The Architect speaks. "Always the Creatures, on every world Emandia sought new home. Always were the Creatures there, half-found in what the Island itself grew, but more."

He is now hunched over his low podium, reading the text closely. "It was agreed she would come first & if needed lead them all away again. She was arted for this purpose, & so came first.

"It was the quirk in her animated nature that caused them to be. Committed to this new world, unremembering any other, these would be her single clue."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

One of the bolder young men in the group. Challenging, conscious or not.

“What do you mean by ‘quirk’? Like a design flaw?”

“Yes & no.”

“Was she a golem? Or a piece of sentient cybernetic hardware?”

The Architect is now standing over the cross-legged student. He looks up, tentatively, but holds to his question.

“Stand up.”

The boy stands.

“What are you?”

“What?”

“What are you? Golem? Sentient cybernetic hardware?”

“I’m . . . human.”

“What does that mean? How is different, how do you know?”

The boy smiles. The Architect nods, motions the boy to sit. Hesitantly, but still, he sits.

The Architect resumes. Bowie notices that he does not really need the text, he has the words utterly memorized. Maybe it’s just looking at the page, touching it, being with it new & again.

“Given her kind’s yearn, their love of music, these Creatures would live in the caverns beneath the Tangled Gate, at the beginning.”

Architect pauses. nods at the talkative boy. He exhales sharply but then speaks promptly: “What found on the Island, who came to the Island, how the dreams of men fired through it all?”

Architect resumes. “These Creatures would also leave the Island, scatter through history among the world’s homegrown men & women, clues, like their dreams.”

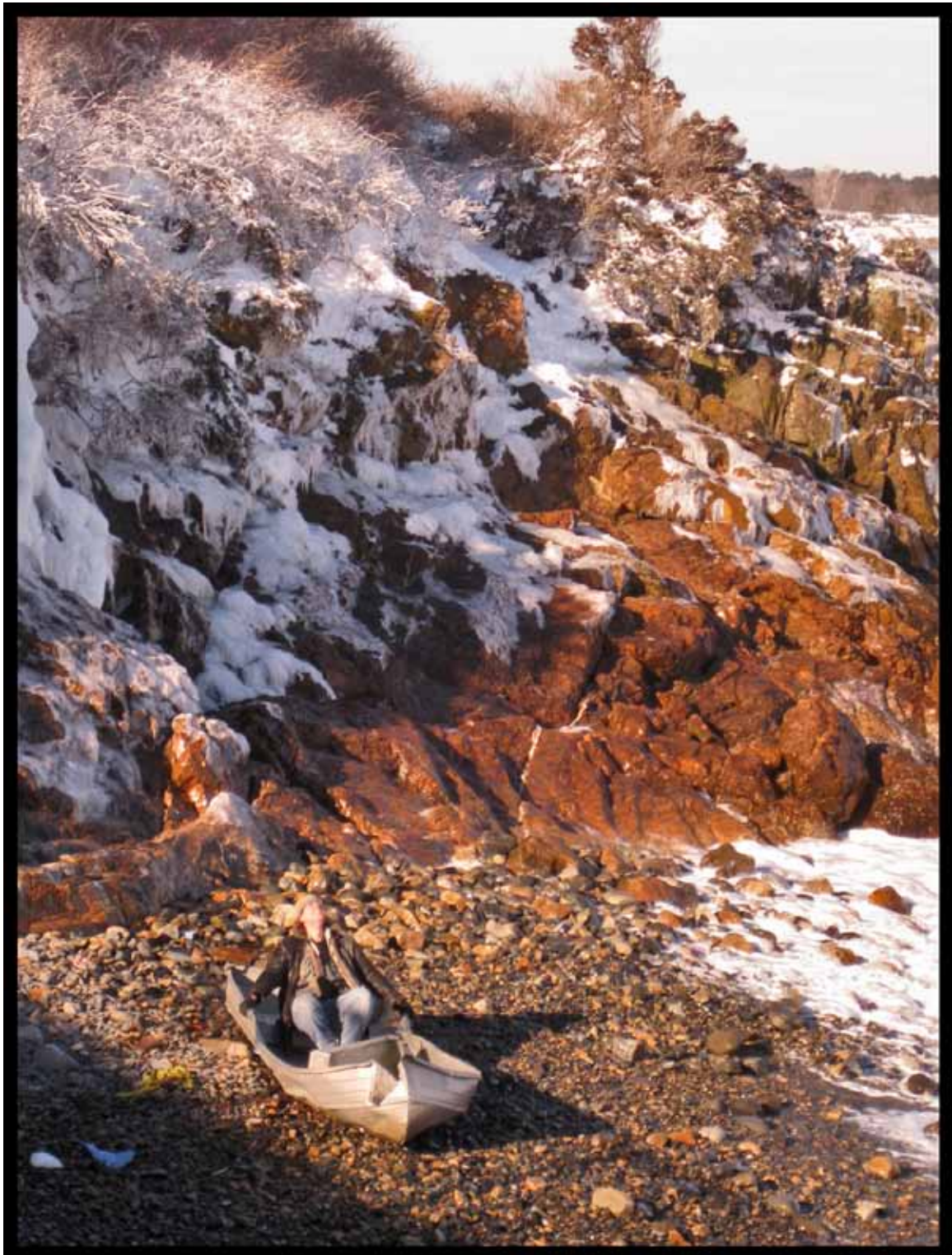
Bowie knows the rest of this lesson, recognizes each word as previously read, tries to use them this time again to break through his interior wall, his memory block.

“If you slept with a Creature in your arms when small, dreamed the untellable, woke wildly, the night big & silent, you were close.

“As you grew, & made your ways through the mysteries of want, & men’s answers, you were further away. Rightly yearned those wild, silent nights. Yes, there was unseen music.”

Bowie is young, there is a school he goes to for while, there is a girl, ah there s a girl, her name is . . . Iris.

Iris likes to draw pictures in class, sometimes easy cartoonish figures, elves, hobbits, dragons, but sometimes her fancies keep her awhile & the figures on the page multiply, ever more grotesque, & beautiful too, she draws like in a trance, Bowie watches as the teacher will be lecturing, then noticing her a little, then a little more. He’ll nudge her, urgently, better to stop & hide than be confiscated—



She smiles at him. Starts to see him as she sees her page, her blush is slight but he now dreams wildly, wishes he had a talent too—

Nothing more than nudges & smiling & slight blushes till there is a party, the kind meant to expose romantic tangles, press them a little for potential—

Spin the bottle. Oh yes. Winners take 5 minutes, timed closely, in a closet.

They won. He was convinced she'd conjured a spell from one of her stranger drawings. But there they were. And she is curled into him in this tiny, crowded, smelly closet. Whispering so softly nobody in the world, or leaning hard against the door, could hear.

“We can only do so much in here. And we only have five minutes.”

Without another word she leans even closer into him & takes his hand under her blouse, her stomach, her small breasts, their hard nipples, & further along, under her skirt, into her panties, teaching his fingers to touch there, & there, & like so, & so, her breath quicks as his finger enters her pussy, breath hardens, & in a little more, & a little more, he scares, scares hard & pulls back suddenly.

Just as suddenly the door crashes open & all the smiling & unsmiling faces & glaring light. Nothing to see or know but the drying salty dampness on his finger tips.

Did they love each other? Or were they two young animals hungry for that touch again? They rarely kissed, & it always happened in the dark. She controlled the what & how, & knew he spooked easily.

Maybe it would have gone on, or possibly ended, but instead they were caught &, he being the boy, & so of course the seducer, was expelled.

Suddenly, the Architect is leaning hard into Bowie's face. “When you no longer wondered their fate, long given to attract to taller icons & thicker books, they continued too.” Architect nods to Bowie.

He speaks emotionlessly: “What found on the Island, who came to the Island, *how the dreams of men fired through it all.*”

He was expelled but that wasn't enough. She would crawl through his window. Now all she wanted were his arms & he obliged though he'd have to sneak to the bathroom each time, to jack away his ferocious wish to fuck her hard & screaming. He'd come back. She'd sniff the air & smile in the dark.

This until Bowie's father got up one night, sniffed the air, came to his room.

“When the world began to run down, it would be again Creatures to your console, in one form or another, loving you, leaving you this time.”

Who was she, this Iris? Why does the Architect's talk of Creatures make him think of her, sweatingly, prick hard, think of her?

The Architect continues: "For she would summon them back to her, from all places & times, remembered some things, & time to move along, little Creatures, time again."

Bowie was taught by the Architect, all the Sleepers were taught, find the Creatures if you can, remember which ones you knew when small & the feeling, the wild silent nights, the unseen music. "Find them when you can. When you are near, it helps to hum, it helps to sing, it helps to smile. Be ready to dance as they are."

All Bowie could think of was Iris, why? A girl, not a Creature. Right? He didn't know. He wished Preacher were there to tell him, or warn him. He sniffed his fingers, then they are suddenly grabbed up by the Architect. He sniffs, though how many years since. He nods, smiles as rarely. "Her. Yes." He says quietly.

xxxiv.

Bowie kept to himself for awhile. Stopped going to the Architect's classes. They weren't mandatory but nobody missed them. Bowie did. No word was mentioned.

He wandered further in the caverns than before. They seemed to have no end, it turned out, once you looked hard enough to discover where boulders & rocks had been placed to obscure tunnels. Bowie found them, circumvented them, left them in place. He wasn't trying to destabilize things.

Got lost. Oh, it was pathetic. He'd chalked rocks along his climb, deeper & deeper, but eventually he had to traverse dark places, slowly, by feel, & eventually he tripped up, lost direction, thought he was done.

Sad he'd failed his mission, whatever quite it had been, & sat in one of the darker places to rest, try to let go.

The Architect found him. Or was just there of a sudden, sitting next to him, back against the rocky wall, compelling a water bottle into his hand. Had he looked for him? Or just manifested with a finger snap?

They sat silently for awhile then suddenly the Architect began to talk.

"Before you, there was only one who disappeared. She didn't lose herself in these tunnels like you. She disappeared beyond the Dreaming."

Bowie listens.

"She should not have been sent. She knew everything. How it begins & how it all ends. She

thought it was funny, like a game.

“A very old man had told her when she was small, ‘If you can stay awake in your dreams, & begin to look around, you will learn strange things.’

The Architect laughs briefly. “She told nobody, it was funnier that way. She found her Creatures in dreams, of course, & they welcomed her, of course, with a dance & a song.”

Bowie nods, like that helps.

“Her first lover, chosen more by whim than thought, let her down, unable to sleep awake in their tangle of blankets & candlelight.”

[“Why don’t you love me?”

“It’s not that.”

“What is it?”

“You’re beautiful. You make me laugh. But when I disappear, how will you find me?”]

[He looked & looked till he was quite old, & she’d become quite someone else, but he’d found her at last. Offered a place to rest. Fits.]

“Her next lover seemed to know, to touch her keys & make a better music, but shied off her harder harmonies. Liked her to moan his night but not caterwaul for all creation. *Alas.*”

Bowie nearly laughs. Maybe not.

“She came to us with big eyes, a little smarts, a show of tit, a little wit. She was among the first group sent across the Dreaming. I was still uncertain, so I gave her the least hard task. She simply did her task, & didn’t return.

“She pulled herself whole through the Dreaming, took the smallest form for her travels & games to come. A simple dress, big smile, laughing eyes. Like they were cackling.”

“What was her task?”

“Hm?”

“The task she was assigned when she disappeared?”

“Oh.” He thinks. “I don’t remember.”

“How did you know the form she took later?”

“I found her.”

“You did? What happened?”

“Nothing. She’d made her choice.”

“But you prefer it not happen?”

“No. We don’t know how it would affect things. Besides, most would not choose it.” Pauses.

“Are you lost in these tunnels by choice?”

“No.”

“Do you want to return?”

Bowie nods. They return more quickly than seems possible.

Bowie is relieved to return, even knowing that he, too, is going to be leaving.

xxxv.

The Architect ceases the classroom sessions. For some days, he is not seen, nothing seems to happen. The students wait, wonder what next.

Then, deep in a night when all are in their Capsules, all seems peaceful, there is a noise. A distinct sound, like rocks falling.

Everyone is awake, walking around, looking. Wondering where the Architect is. Someone points to a new fissure in the walls. Bowie nods, walks through, the rest follow.

There is . . . moonlight? Trees, tall tall trees surrounding a long clearing. Bowie & the others walk around, uncertainly.

Then the drums & fires start up. Like a fingersnap & all is tribal. The Sleeper students move toward the fires, the drums, it all has the feel of a shared dream, a beautiful shared dream.

Built by the Architect, thinks Bowie, moments before his voice begins to speak. His voice seems to come from everywhere & nowhere, from within & without, soft & loud, begins to discourse at length among the fires & drums, & the Sleepers now become dancers among many others.

“I was the first to cross the Dreaming, years before anyone else. I’d created a loose network of knowledge & contacts before the rest knew, while they still leaned on leaders & the learned to stop the crash. I was busy.” Words echo through the long moonlit field, its bowl-like terminus surrounded by a majesty of great trees, above which strode the great fullmoon monarch of skies.

Bowie moves among the Sleepers & other dancers, nears awhile the tall fires & their many drummers, sways a little but does not dance, resists it, feels like resisting this is what Preacher would advise—

Climbs the grassy bowl’s clearing toward the trees above, & the Architect talks on.

“There had to be powerful Sleep Capsules, hundreds of them, constructed in a deep cavern, below leaders & the wars they reluctantly tried to slow [these words endlessly echo out but Bowie hears more as he enters the White Woods: “Toward the end, more became convinced that this ending was the right one, that God willed it, or would stop it if he wished. The world had become so poisoned that death was coming for most sooner anyway. My partner & I” “Partner?” Bowie says aloud to the voice in his head. “You call him Preacher now.” “You knew?”]

Suddenly, to all again, the great voice: “The Capsules would gleam white in the lamps upon them, stone mined in the high mountains where the workmen labored up single file with heavy coils on their shoulders. It would ride in slabs down steep tracks to where I would ferry it along.” [“Through dreams?” “First, to the sea.” “Why?” “The sea was the common, the most stable entry point across the Dreaming.”]

The girl watches him approach, seeming talking to himself. She’s watched him often, but kept her distance. As he nears, heedless his steps, she steps out enough from her hiding place for him to graze her, & she lightly tumbles.

Suddenly Bowie is very present. There is enough moon between the trees to see the girl looking up shocked at him. Enough scent lingering from their slight collision for his body to tense fiercely.

“Oh!” she says, “I’m sorry. I didn’t know anyone else—”

He shakes his head, smiles. Offers a hand, adding touch to sniff & sight & sound in his receiving her being. She rises & stands before him. Smiles his in return.

“You’re a Sleeper. I’ve seen you.”

He nods. Wonders if the Architect is watching, planned this. As if neither to confirm nor refute, the great voice continues: “There had to be allies who knew we were coming, & why, who had already traced on to our dilemma from their seeds, some of many, & would give us both shelter & cover to operate. I found Travelers in many places & times, beautiful sober faced men, eager-thighed women. These would tender & teach us too.”

Relieved of their moment, both of them listen, too closely, to the Architect’s mammothly echoing words. Bowie notices she twitches at the word “Travelers,” just a flicker.

He begins to drift away, to see what. “Wait,” she says, whispers, barely more than thinks. He turns.

“Why aren’t you down there, with the dancing & drums?”

Tells a fragment of truth. “I’m not much for parties. He could have told us all this in class.”

She nods, smiles strangely.

“And you? Don’t all pretty young girls like to dance?”

Again the flicker of a twitch. A freckle’s height.

“I prefer the woods. Always have.”

The titanic voice: “Crossing the Dreaming was exhausting, double since landing was usually in the sea. I caused the building of a simple Pensionne with doors from many directions. I caused its gardens raised up, rooted it all in many centuries & places, open to all, but especially our Dreaming kind.”

Bowie’s turn to twitch, less obscurely.

“What’s wrong?”

She is slender, her hair long, nearly to her waist, twisted into a few blooms as it drapes over her shoulders, covering her breasts better than the thin garment she wears.

Bowie moves up to her, the weest twitch but nothing else. He leans into her face & kisses her light but lengthy, the last sense now taking its due. He is tasted & assessed in return. They sit together, against a very old, tall, sentient tree that listens too but does not comment.

Holding hands, sitting close, they listen: “I did not cause or coax the White Tiger to come, but when he came I knew we weren’t alone, & my efforts not so desperately hopeless.

“I knew further by stories of a Tramp met at the Threshold of the Dreaming, a tattered man with secret advice.”

“My partner told me these things. The Pensionne. The White Tiger. The Tramp,” Bowie says. She nods, listens, does not reply.

“There was one I regretted leaving behind, one Sleeper I felt an oddness for. She never mentioned the Tramp. When I decided to leave, I weakened into her arms the night before. I wanted her to take over, her to protect them, comfort them if I failed. She was a woman with even scander trinkets than the rest, but a single white shell.” Pause. Resume.

“She’d listen to it for hours. These are my only regrets.”

Bowie has been listening with his eyes closed, starting to get it, what this night is all about. The Architect is already gone. This girl was the one who last saw him, the one he wanted to take over.

He closes his eyes to listen, to allow her escape, if she wishes. His hand releases hers to pull his coat tighter. If she’s to go, then go.

She goes. She leaves her single white shell in her place. Now for him to decide.

xxxvi.

Bowie does not look for her. Waits to see what the other teachers will do, when it’s generally accepted the Architect is gone.

He quickly realizes that none of them were the Architect’s equal in power or knowledge, they well knew the texts, & were veteran Sleepers, but the vision was the Architect’s alone.

They continue teaching their classes, which Bowie does not attend. Most of his fellow students start attending, for a way to spend the hours, maybe more importantly to regain some familiar hours, tamp down the panic.

He should follow the Architect, but how? He only knows how to get back to Preacher, a word, a gesture. [An older Bowie would have just followed first & figured the how later.]

The girl who gave him the shell? The Architect hadn’t taken her with him. She hadn’t

taken charge of anything, as seemed his wish.

He keeps to his Capsule for several days. Has stored away a good supply of the dream juice, but does not drink it.

Had Preacher known this might happen? Sure, something like it.

So most hours he tries tinkering with the Capsule's controls, see if they can help him learn anything. Blows out most of the lights & they don't return. Breaks & fixes the temperature controls.

Finds an electronic cache of audio & listens through decades & decades of news reports.

It's hard to deduce whether the environment or the world economy collapses first. They really went together, it seemed. Slowly, so that the suffering increased gradually, appealing to the mass's desire to ignore, to huddle closer to strong leaders, to fear the increasing poor & willing let them be herded off to camps or, really, wherever. Each believing he & his loved ones would, should, be spared, ride out the worst, survive to better days.

Loyalty & racism mixed with growing apocalypticism. But slowly, decades in the happening. Blame was sharply focused, responsibility deflected. Someone else's fault, someone else had to sacrifice, or be sacrificed.

War & scarcity finally met & all justifications for survival were allowed. Us & them. Us versus them. No choice.

But nothing about the Architect, or Sleeping Capsule, or Sleepers, or the Gate, or the dreaming juice. Hope, what there was, lay hid many miles below the burning, dying surface of the world.

One night period, Bowie had turned from the news & history to music. Took a lot of searching to find some he knew, but he did. Nothing sorted, no hierarchy or order to it, he found himself listening to a country rock band called Mason Profitt, here in his fantastical Sleeping Capsule maybe hundreds of years later.

Acoustic guitar & sad harmonies. *"My shadow left my mind & went walkin' around, & found a nickel on the ground . . ."*

A knock on his Capsule, soft, very soft. He released the lid & lifted it slightly. The girl who'd given him the shell. He raised the lid enough to let her in.

She climbs in & sits among his blankets, wearing the same gauzy rag, or similar. He lights a couple of candles, turns up the vent, dims the light.

Pulls the shell from one of the many canvas pockets on the wall, offers it to her. She smiles, reaches for him instead. Blows out his candles.



His hands roam her gently. Her breath quicks, & encouraged he explores more. But under the gauze he finds . . . nothing womanly. No chest, no nipples. No pussy. She is a warm piece of carved flesh. His hands do not find what his mind surely remembered he'd half seen already.

Yet she is curled closely to him, clearly enjoying his dear embrace. She takes the white shell from his unrecalling mind & cuddles their heads together to listen.

Whatever this is, it's as close as he can get to the Architect at the moment. So he listens to the sea with her.

Within its roar & whoosh, her voice, or her mind's voice, or her memories expressing themselves directly.

"I listened to the sea, I listened to the sea. I curl into the blue & crimson blankets of my Sleeping Capsule, nude with my candles, & listen to my single white shell.

"They would listen too, from afar, they'd quickly learned for times when I was not visiting. They listened to the sea. They listened to the sea. They would tend my scars & sighs, & listen to the sea."

She kisses Bowie closely & he feels her body glow & reshape itself for a moment, but when he presses a little, she recedes again. Stillness, silence. More telling.

"When you left I knew. You were too gentle with me, tasted & possessed me to remember, to say goodbye, like a bloom left obscure in my heart's chambers, to discover later, words you didn't have, or refused to give me."

Bowie listens deeper, clasps her body, her fingers closer, listens to the sea & to her voice, to both, till they are one continuous sound, till his listening becomes one with this sound & all is one telling music. *Listens to the sea.*

"I loved for you to listen to the sea as I slowly descended your beautiful torso, kiss by kiss by kiss, you closed your eyes & listened to the single white shell as I moved your thighs apart, as I sipped your sweat, as I licked & teased, as you listened to the sea, its long ancient roar, its deeper *hummmmmmm* than all, *o you listened to the sea* as I drank your seed deep into my throat & then licked my way back to you" Bowie become her & him both, tongue & taste & seed & skin, sea & sea & sea, swish, roar, swish, roar, swissshh

"to your parched mouth, your closed eyes, I kept a part of your seed to drink with me, drink with me, drink with me, we drink & we listen to the sea, together drink your seed back & forth between us, listen to the sea, drink your seed, goodbye my love, listen to the seed, drink your sea, goodbye my love, goodbye, goodbye"

xxxvii.

You'd not given me the key or clue to what I knew was there, not even that last night in my arms, not a word. I had to find it myself.

So many lives, I sorted through them for one. Not sweet, I need an edge. The dream juice I press harder in doses, add in endangering herbs, pressing myself in.

Find myself with almost too much heat to bear & a skinny young torso to wield. Blonde, curved, small, shapely. Violet-green eyes. Thick, suggestive mouth, cheeks that flame easily, fingers I cannot tame or even calm.

Corralled into a kind of youth prison for behavioral training. The trainers are half-dead, bitter, embers of old hungers to nurture, or consume.

I moved quickly from the sloppy groping romances of boys, who just wanted to stick their hard youths into *any* wet willing thing, to the charging careens of men who wanted to coax a greedy blaze to the field & then crush it loudly. I shifted & shifted & shifted my game, my moves, my body, my voice. Edging them closer to me, closer, jewel my body, but don't touch it, & burn. Clothe me close, clothe me tight, burn by my hand in yours. Burn hard, *harder*.

Nothing. Lust. *Nothing*.

Then one, he saw me, laughed, leaned back, sang in a cracked voice of time:

*o dear sweet old dirty time leaving
all the old men sad & splayed
in a young girl's careless smile.*

He didn't give me a necklace to light the breasts he sought to bite. He didn't clothe me to tease his cynical old cock with hints of my slender hips. He didn't just try to make me burst of sweet words spoke in a flaming virgin's ear—

Allowed onto the green grounds of the prison, but no farther, I spend my seeming days there under the shade of trees, eyes closed, testing out deeper dreams, but nothing sticks. Vague, groundless, I can't get deeper.

Then, once day, he's there, under the tree, also cross-legged, facing me with a bare smile on his shaggy old face.

Trying not to jerk with panic, I inhale deep within & nod slightly.

With an accent I can't figure he says, "I'll be mowing & trimming out here soon. Figured I'd betta' warn you against shocking your meditations."

"Thanks."

Now he smiles fuller. "T'ain't easy in that place." Gestures to the prison in the distance. "I miss my youth but I wouldn't want it back if I had to be there."

I laugh a little.

We become friends of a sort. The body I bear does not want or fear him, as it does toward everyone else in the prison.

No, safe. We laugh a lot, about silly things. He knows every squirrel & crow on the grounds, their squabbles, their endurance. Admires them.

I don't seem to live anywhere yet arrive from somewhere by morning & leave by night. Always dressed in the same barely concealing rags, like every other girl in the prison. This, I decide, has to change.

I don't want to, but I ask him. He smiles, almost like he was expecting the question, & leads me with a beckoning, bemused finger to his shack at the far edge of the prison grounds.

It's small. A bed, a table, a shelf of books. Some candles. I sit in the one chair while he fusses around in an ancient foot locker.

On the shelf, built by a plank & some bricks, I spy a small furry Creature. Sitting, calmly, looking at me. I say nothing.

Finally, he pulls out a set of overalls, sits on the bed, fussing them with scissors & thread down to my size.

"Undress." I start.

He stares hard at me. "I'm gonna dress you."

I take off the rags but he shakes no to my underwear. I am relieved even as there is no lust in his eyes. He wants to dress me & I think it was a long while before I knew why. No boy or man had touched me without intent before. When he does, it's to make sure these old but clean clothes fit me right, to impress the touch of his hand upon me. He dresses me sober-faced but with deep affection.

Satisfied, he feeds me some bread & soup. Hums something I feel like I know as he cooks. I know somehow this is our final meeting, words horde at my mouth but none come out.

The Creature is watching, almost waiting for me. I study it. Her. A lavender colored puppy, with bright dark eyes, brown bows in her fur.

"She's here for you," he says. "Happy birthday."

I'm shocked. It is? Isn't it? OK. Still: "I don't know."

"You want to find them, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You won't alone. Not in a thousand lifetimes. She'll bring you right to them."

Then he picks up a lavender candle, color of her fur, hands it to me. "So you don't lose your

way following her. They can go very fast. Comes of all the times they've had to."

Looks at me, smiles without humor. I wait breathless.

Speaks softly, almost reluctantly. "You have no within yet for yourself. Why would you want a hand or cock in there too?" How does he know I haven't? That every time I've receded within me. You can try, & they did, but you can't stick a prick into a wall with no door.

I wake. Listen. The cavern is quiet, all are in their Capsules asleep. Or fucking quietly. Or beyond the Dreaming.

I climb out, with my lavender birthday pup & candle. Thinking twice, not returning, I get my single white shell & then nod to the pup. She sniffs twice, & we go.

[I would have given you this shell, Bowie, Architect, Tramp, given you all, if only I was just a girl.]

xxxviii.

They listen to the sea in my single white shell, & I want to say how, give it all words, so they will know me true, & this something will release me.

"It was on the beach of the Island, that first morning I came. I'd been swimming for hours when I washed with the tide ashore."

They gather, listen, sniff. White Bunny, several bears, many giraffes, I shiver & want to say. Two bloo-eyed kittees. More sniff & near, I wonder if the Imp will cackle up.

"I found this shell in my hand. There weren't any others. It was too rocky, inhospitable, yet this shell. I listened. I lay in tidal waters, *listening to sea.*"

More Tenders among them emerge to sniff me. A little pinknosed bear in a red & white striped bonnet. A White Tiger with long spots. I am agitated. I talk. Talking pushes the something away a bit, undoes my panic, I talk.

"Was I her? Was I the demon of the old stories? I did not know as I followed her path, followed her days, from living on the beach, burning with the sun & moon, to my approach to the Castle, Dancing Grounds, the King, his Temple. The Princess."

I am convulsing they put the shell to my ear, I feel my body blowing itself out, they put the shell to my ear. They begin to hum, a brown bear with great brown eyes leads them, humming to calm me. I close my eyes. I talk on.

"I follow her down the hall, my other, my path, all that has led me here, all I have done. She turns back, sees me. I see her with my eyes, then see me with hers. Then both. We cry out, &

it's over. I'm awake."

I raise up & look about this cavern, so impossibly tall, a great tree, reaching to its heights. My lavender pup in my lap. My candle, not lit right now. All around me, raised noses. Listening with ears.

"I was back in the sea, where I came from, & I lived in silence thousands years."

"Until?" one asks.

"I don't know. I closed my eyes & let it all go. Drifted upward from the depths I'd been. Landed ashore. Not the Island. No Island."

The something hardly at all in me now. I'd spoken my question & been heard. There were no good answers. I was the demon, that's what they'd called me, the one who'd destroyed the King & his Island Kingdom.

They all speak in my mind, a single sweet powerful voice.

"There is no demon."

I resist.

"No." They insist.

I return to the Sleepers cavern after all, thousands years later. My Capsule, its crimson & purple blankets.

The Architect wanted me to return, to lead them. It doesn't take long.

The Creatures are always with me now. We listen together to the single white shell, & often hum, to sing.

xxxix.

"When she leaves I have no reason to stay. I load my gear, pile my shack on its wagon, & pull off. The prison behind me is one of thousands in every land & time. It is where end-times are incubated every day over many centuries.

"My path is slow, & I have too much time to think. This shack I pull belonged to a friend of mind, he was a small exotic.

"I never knew a word he said. I'd visit him, in that shack behind me, in the middle of the desert, back when I still crossed the Dreaming, back & forth.

"We'd sit on two small stools. He'd click away for hours on end. We were happy old friends.

"Then a day his shack was empty & he no more."

Looks at Bowie fiercely & talks on. "I tell you this because crossing the Dreaming is how I felt

that morning, coming to see my friend at his desert shack. Nothing. Shack locked. Nothing. Crossing the Dreaming, you will bind, you will be broken, you will be bereft. You'll return home, if you can."

Bowie nods politely to the Tramp. He's not going to be a help in finding her, he can see. Still, better to make this friend.

The Tramp takes a breath & talks on. "Maybe you'll come back. You'll try again. You want to save the world, it matters, nothing else is as important to you. You'll leave family, sweethearts, the bleak sadness of your end-times."

Bowie nods. Patient.

"You'll see me again, nod, pass, we'll have fewer words. What more could I say?"

Bowie senses the old man is almost spent of words, & willing waits him out.

"I could tell you my story, how I became the Tramp who greets Sleepers crossing the Dreaming." "Didn't you? Just now? Your friend? This shack?"

The man starts, looks at Bowie sharply. Starts to go on, pauses. Does.

"Once we didn't need potions & Sleep Capsules to cross. But I remained when the rest turned away toward planting spikes to mark the earth, map it, name it, burn its trees, siphon its fluids, black its skies, poison its waters."

Stands up from his stool, towers shakily over Bowie.

"Since my friend has been gone, & the girl you chase, my step has grown more & more heavy. I am the Tramp, as they call me."

Leans down to Bowie's face. "I could compel you feel how I walk, & test your own by it. As you pass me each time, a nod, a brief word, a world to save, I could tell you that what you left behind is what miracle this world has left to give you. And the rest are just heavier steps on your path."

Stands up. Nods. Says softly, "Maybe I'm just wrong of it all."

xl.

I said: No more musics for now.

The air is still as I breathe in & out.

The stars dark, the woods bright.

I continued: I am dreaming. I am awake.

I love the stories, whatever they mean.

I miss the boy I was years ago.

I conclude: I live on because men are hopeful
for tomorrow, whatever odds or proof
stand before them.

xli.

Wakes. She wakes. The pain in her back grabs her breath, & she wilds for air among covers. A snatch, another, *there*.

A noise outside. Which world this time? Oh. Dogs barking. *Oh*.

She lies back, still breathing tenderly & too-aware. That dream. The Island. Was it—?

A breath not hers. A man's shoulder. His bare chest. Still sleeping. Quicks her query.

She closes her eyes, mostly, more breath, less dream. Feels it out slow. A taste on her tongue. His? No spilled seed tastes like this. It tingles. It . . . listens?

There is the softest *hmmm* on her skin. In her breath, in the air. Her nose twitches. *Twitches?* Sniffs something potent, mysterious, important.

The man sudden harasses his covers. She sniffs again. Just his scent, on him, lingering on her.

Shuts her eyes more, dares. *That dream*. Its barest remain. A question, she tugs, gently, maybe a thread back in? (How?)

A question. What rhymes with the moon?
What rhymes with the moon?

She relaxes, tries to gentle into this body, its pale-rose, bone-contoured heat. She's young but matured in breast, hips, mouth. This man is here for its pleasures, perhaps nothing more.

And her? Something to do with the *Hummm* in the air. He'd led her closer somehow, his voice, that instrument in the corner of the room, among their tangled clothes.

The pain that'd awaked her was her own making, her alarum, the *Hummm* plainest in early morning, when the lights from windows & those within have not fully reassembled this world's architecture from its dream bolts & limbs.

xlii.

A hand softly on her breast, a sleepy smile inviting. She tempts. His teeth & tongue linger upon her from the night, his powerful cock consuming her all. Tender thighs the easy price.



Hand withdraws a little, not one to beg, at least right now.

“You don’t taste a thousand years old,” he says in a handsome accented growl.

“Hm?” Lets her eyes go blue & girly.

“It’s what you said during our fun. You were very high.” She’s still blank. “Mushrooms. But don’t worry. We liked each other first.”

She laughs. It was true & he did not believe a word. She was the kind of prize a good guitarist earned on a good night. He was grateful, fond, generous. But she was a girl, & he was a guitarist.

Thinking through body want & other wants, she thrashes a bit to snatch up his guitar & pull it into the bed with them.

“Play.”

“Sing?”

“Hum.”

He smiles. Nods. Kooky chick. Sweet smile though. Hot ass. He plays. He hums.

She rewards, moving between his thighs, coaxing, with little try, his cock up nice & hard. His playing falters, his humming, she lets up a little. He plays, he *hmmms*. She touches. She teases. She smiles & licks.

At first it’s just vague pretty strumming & a humming barely more than a moan. But she licks harder, softer, nibbles, bites. She squeezes, scratches, playing him as she determines how this works. Plays him, plays the *Hummm*. When he seems about to blow, she retreats, breathes him gently back a bit.

Where to . . . she closes her eyes & takes his cock into her mouth deeper, he’s now playing powerfully, it’s a game, a musical game, he wants to be good, of course he does, & so he plays as much to her touch as she plays his strumming & humming.

She feels around in her mind, pushing & stretching & riding the *Hmmm*, where to, where—

The wall. The hole in the wall. Her friends. The cavern. The Gate. *Why am I here?*

She sucks his seed so powerfully into her throat that he cries in pain, curses, cannot stop until she has drunk him all in, *oooo ooshit oooooofuck oooooo fuckfuckfuckgoddyesss*

She drinks his cock dry & drier & shriveled to empty. He lies back finally. What the *fuck* was that? What pretty girl like this one sucks cock like that?

Minutes pass as the pain recedes.

Suddenly she’s standing, dressed, kissing his cheek.

“What?”

“Thank you.”

“What?”

Smiles, girlish as a coed, she blows him a kiss & leaves.

He misses rehearsal that day. Next show. He looks for her. She is not to be found.

xliii.

Days pass. I lie in my bed looking out the single tall window, its sky, its moon, its stars. Knocks at the door come & go.

I begin to forget after a time. Arrive here, to this place, more & more. Now time to eat. Now time to sleep. Now a man at my breast & thighs though none like my musician. He still looks for me, but more often in dreams, in the eyes of those who dance & smile for him tonight.

The world as this is settles on my back & shoulders like a shawl. I agree to eat & walk in streets. I agree to work. Money pays my room & my clothes & my food.

Something in me still listens for the Hum, listens ever hungrier as days pass, as I seem to forget.

I take on a name. A word from a dream. Iris. I find a picture in a book. A blue flower. A messenger. A daughter of the rainbow.

I remember coming home that night tired, feeling pushed & pulled at all day, bothered because I could not remember the most important thing.

My room was my place for my bed. On it, my blankets, which I kept near no matter the day & night warm or cold. The electric blue fuzzy one, the soft crimson one. Soon I had many. I lie among them like my many lovers.

Maybe a full moon. Maybe many candles. I have oils in my hand & along my thighs, not to cum, but to slow, to concentrate deeper.

I am following a stream for many miles, at first climbing among the rocks along its shores, then I wade in, already nude, I swim, do I have fins? The stream enters a cave, moves faster, I let go & am swept steadily along & come to drier ground, arriving.

Strand, walk, become girl again.

A cavern so high, I walk on tiptoes examining its shiny, glittering beauty.

I'm not alone. Many are watching me. My nose twitches & knows. I wait. I accept. Whatever it is, I accept.

You approach me & I recognize you, my friend! You are a turtle not a turtle. You smile at me, that familiar look of love & worry & devotion.

"You came."

"You . . . sent?"

"I missed you. I'm sorry."

"I don't remember. Worse & worse."

He nods, sadly. "It's what happens."

"But why?"

"It's the Hum."

"Yes. What?"

"You chase the Hum to some place & time. And you arrive & then you begin to forget."

"But why?"

You sigh at me helplessly.

"You are trying to fix things. You think something in the Hum can make it right."

"What?"

"The world. Men & their world."

I wake. Right the fuck then. Tangled in my blanket lovers, horny as a cactus for some reason I wake up & *fuck*.

What do I do? I go back to work. The restaurant rolls through half a dozen cities in a week & then I'm back for a couple of days off.

I'm usually able to pick off a good one to keep my company for the trip. He rents our room, I fuck him about twice a day. Some of them like me wet & pliant, which gives me too much time to think, so I start sniffing for the kinkier ones. Usually there are costumes & a chain or two.

"Why don't you just use one of the rooms they give us?"

I smile at her, snap my gum like it's my IQ, & say, "What the fun if I come home with lots of tips but no teeth marks on my ass?"

Until the time I meet my match. A musician, he plays in the passengers' lounge for free. Reminds me of someone. I skip my late shift to listen.

Sings a few old rock numbers & people drift away but me. More & more, as the black landscape rolls past, we lock onto each other.

Especially when he begins to *hmmmmmm. O shit*.

He's found me. After so long looking. But there's something in him new & bad. He confuses me, my job, my surroundings, with what I am.

I try to calm him, hold him, but he wants to fuck, wants to hurt me, hurt something in me, & I let him a bit, it's his due. Then he hits me. OK. Again. Um. *Again. No.*

It's then I learn what I'm not. I slow his fist as he has me pinned on the bed. Slow it, pry open its fingers. It hurts him.

"Will you stop?" I say quietly.

"I lost so much because of you." His fingers begin to fist up again.

"Will you stop?" I say urgently, not wanting to.

His face, his beautiful musician's face, contorts wildly over me as his fist begins to swing.

It never reaches me. He never reaches me. He isn't there anymore.

Silence, hours. I let my wounds fester, knowing I could heal them, I could heal everything in this body. But.

I get off at the next city & wander streets for a few days. It feels better. These men & women don't work for pleasure, they work from fear. It gives them something to do, to put their hands & minds to. Their leaders & preachers offer them nothing, don't even allow the hard questions to be asked.

I find a room & a bed like the other one & again only me & my blanket harem to cuddle down.

But no. I need a friend. Like the guitarist tried to be & failed. Couldn't get my scent out of his eyes.

I close the shade & collect all my blankets close & I intend into my dream. The watery stream, the cave. Finally the cavern. There. A sniff. My friends.

"We came."

"I sent."

"You did. We've missed you, Princess."

"It's just Iris, for now."

xliii.

I startle & awake. The musician is gone though he searches me still. I hear his music still, deepens, saddens, no long art, or appeal, but a simple burning, warmth for lonely hearts who open to it, light to show them their paths on. He never stays. He searches.

I know nothing. I am nobody. There is no answer. There is sadness & morning light. The Hum always, & it is beautiful, & it tells me nothing.

The cavern. My friends.

The Island. The Gate. *Why am I here?*

Why can't I be there with you?

One morning I walk out into this world, & there is dirty snow piled against the streets, & birds twittering & chuckling the air, & I look into faces as they pass, & listen in a little, to each's bright tangle. Look down at my own hands. Clench, unclench.

Trying to understand better, I sniff the trees scattered through the city. They are ill, they languish. They despair. I sniff deeper. They despair *especially of me*.

I kneel & beg for more, but nothing.

A soft hand on my shoulder. Two bright tangled faces.

"Are you alright, Miss?"

"*Oh*. Yes. Thank you."

They offer me water, fruit & nuts. Help me from the ground to a bench. Look me over, do not sniff but close.

We begin to travel together. It's what they do. Their knapsacks & walking sticks, water pouches & good eyes for camping & not too long. Feed me. Tend me.

Then I dream of the Musician. He has followed me to the Cavern, to my friends. Stands looking at me.

"I can't love you. It's not what I am for. *Understand*."

He strums. My friends come closer, sniffing, listening. The White Bunny, turtle that isn't a turtle. Even the combustible imp stills a little, listens.

He strums more.

"No."

"You can't get there alone. That's never how it works. *You need my song*. I will keep playing for you. *Keep listening*."

I know nothing. I am nobody. I awake to sadness & morning light. These Travelers cannot help me. They feed me. They tend me.

Then it happens unhappily on morning at a market. Their kind gesture to the son of the wrong man. He strikes & kills one of the Travelers without pause. Would kill the other but my hand goes out. He disappears. His son cries out, & I relent. But I cannot bring the dead one back.

Kneeling over the dead Traveler, I realize the Hum has left him. The crying of the other, the fear of the gathered crowd. The son huddling close his returned father. The father panting, eyeing me, waiting.

Music. *I hear the Musician strumming through it all* & a path away appears. I want to bring the other Traveler, help bury her friend, mourn with her.

No. The music compels me separate. "It's their peace to make. It's yours to go now."

I don't understand but sniff. The path he plays is true, true as any Creature, & I walk it, slowly, it leads from the city streets & their trees. But this: the trees less despairing as I walk it.

xliv.

It always begins with the Creatures. Always has. Always does.

"Why?" You ask me.

I say nothing. Cohere to this page, its moment.

White Woods, is what this is. Quiet, at least right now. The trees are tall, & there is no path we walk.

"Listen!" you say, soft but urgently. The *Hummm*, always the *Hummm*.

"The Creatures?" you ask me.

"No. It's the Gate."

She nods. She is smaller than me. I walk beside her feeling too tall & clumsy.

Looks up at me. Smiles.

"The Creatures?" you ask me again.

I nod. Take your hand. "They protect as they can. They are usually small & vulnerable, so they attract our best attention. To protect. To tell secrets to. Cry with."

She nods. Encourages.

I think. "They came with you from Emandia. You came here, one of many to many worlds, & you survived, you & the other."

She nods. We sit together, against a white trunk. The light is murky but there. The air calm.

"Is this helping you?" I ask.

"Is it helping you?" she replies, sharply. Still smiling.

"It's not enough for you to choose to save this world. It has to mark you, before & after you decide. You have to travel its places & years. Feel immortal, some moments, worse than despair others. You have to grow green. You have to be a predator of a thousand kinds. You have to be prey. The kind that escapes, & the kind that doesn't, or somewhat doesn't."

She is listening. I'm not anywhere yet. But I'm flailing a try.

I think. Draw deep into my mind's pen. "The myth does not end with you choosing to stay. It continues. It's open-ended. You're committed."

"So what do I do?"

I pause, think. The skies above now powerfully starred. That's good. It's something.

I hold out my hand. Nod. Again. *Insist.*

There is a soft cackle. Another.

The little black & white imp sudden in my hand. Crazy eyes. The Princess starts, despite herself.

I hold out the imp for show. She gnaws my palm, waiting.

"Is she from Emandia?"

She looks at me. Nods. Shakes her head.

"Exactly. You brought something here to this world, but like yourself, they are made somewhere else, & grown here. Talk!" I suddenly order the imp. Give a little shake to dis-jaw.

She looks at me, crazy wide-eyed. "Eh?" A deaf old lady by mock.

"Talk!"

She cackles high & low, click-clicks & noise-noises for extra pepper, lazily scans for escape routes.

"Just one word. And you can go."

She stares up at me, a thousand feet & an inch tall on my palm. Nods, I think. Blows me a kiss, a spark, "fire," all light, all dark, & she's gone.

I nod.

The Princess breathes hard. "OK. But what then?"

"To be here is *to be vulnerable*, to feel alone. To age. To regret. To die, or feel like it."

So my abilities gone.

Yes.

Mortal.

Yes.

Can I die?

Yes. And no.

Tell me.

I don't think it's that easy. Once you occupy a body, even when it dies, it bleeds & dusts back to the world. Nothing is truly gone. And yet, forms rise & fall. We mourn their passing, fear our own. We don't find enough comfort in memories or markers or songs. We try, but the years wear us down.

"Creatures," you say again.

I nod. "Creatures."

She stands up. Helps me up. She grasps me close for a moment, giving me more than I ask because I am trying to help. And she's gone.

I stay a moment in these Woods. Alone. I know many Creatures who live among these trees.



The tales I know, I tell, & love.

For a moment longer I let Creatures come near to me. The White Bunny. Her hedgehog companion. The little black bear who *hummmms*. The purple furry Creature, dances with ribbons & bows. Not a word.

They sniff me twice, as more of them come into view. The bloo-eyed kittees. A number of bears. The giraffes, of course.

Look at each other as though sniffs being compared. As though it's necessary.

The White Bunny hops up to me, barely tall as my shin, yet a raised pink nose & I lift her up. I do.

Leans into my ear. With a paw's gesture & a soft word. "Scribble Scribble Scribble." By way of best advice. By way of mojo. By way of command too.

I nod. "Help me. Please."

They nod. I sit among them & we sniff far, find the Princess as she undresses, as she sleeps. Lets the breathing blanket that is her body arrive completely. Dreams.

Dreams good.

xlvi.

He was the prince, of nothing at all, a great shouldered black man, with long blonde hair, who I met as I was leaving the White Woods. Seemed real enough, kneeling hunched over a dead fire, staring hard into nothing at all, as though, just gone, it had been a better world.

I sniffed twice, & joined him in kneeling. He turned to me after awhile, after dark, & I felt like his compensation for what he'd just seen, just lost. We buried that dead fire, buried it good, & became the lightest, laughingest, of lovers. Whatever I am, whatever I was.

We long traveled & there were nights when I made him love me so that I could remember. Our hips would slip & grind, I'd gnash him deeper, till it hurt, & *I would see*. My childly bedroom wall. Me dreaming. Its gaping passage in. He would hold me aloft till crying sweat & then bellow all the night into me, that better world, new just gone.

We had to part. High surf just outside our door, an abandoned inn but for its many hallways of sparkling ghosts. We had to part. Standing the inmost hall, a great glass tribute to a drowned whale, the hands of long gone guests impressed into the glass's surface. *We had to part*. "I'll come again." His leaving smile. "You always do."

He was my prince, of nothing at all. A great shouldered black man, with long blonde hair, who I met as I was leaving the White Woods. Kneeling hunched over a dead fire, staring hard into nothing at all, as though, just gone, there was a better world.

The time in walking silence, holding my limbs at night alone. Eventually the new tastes of food. A long morning shower. A slow brush through my hair.

Now come to this city, a green city on the sea, & the remaining loneliness to find who I need, & the hard remembrance of his love to believe that I can.

xlvi.

My childly bedroom. Me dreaming. Into the tunnels. Into the cavern. The great cavern with its great tree, heightless height. Me breathing lighter than ever. *Please don't let it end.*

I wake to the jangling song on the clock radio shaped like a pink cat. My schoolbooks in a pile on the floor beside my bed. No turtle not a turtle. No White Bunny. No giraffes. No tiny imp.

But not not them either. For whatever the day among people folk, their endless craft for big & little traumas to fill their hours, my nights are spent more & more, deeper & deeper, in the tunnels, in the cavern, its great tree, heightless height.

I tell noone. Not yet. Men hardly more than boys eye me & I remind myself I look barely more than a girl. They sniff this slender body but not its mind thousand thousand years old. Is it? I would waning believe if not the dreams.

For the longest time they are simply memories of a childhood I may or may not have spent there, a dreaming Princess in her Island home. They feel real, I let them feel real, but then the jangle, & the pink cat radio, & the schoolbooks on the floor.

Then they begin to change. Suddenly, in one night. Because the hole through the wall is not in that castle bedroom but this one room studio I rent as the poorest of scholars in my classes.

I wake, choking, looking wildly to the wall. Nothing there. A wall. Nothing. Just a dream unless more.

My body yearns something. The boys, the teachers, all willing, I try to love them like the Prince, the Musician before him, but they cry, they bleed, they break. Only once, the one who sneering teaches about poetry & eyes the short skirts in the class, regrets my long one. Likes me, in part, because I do not enjoy how he recites poetry. Like he can tame the words, bend them in the fist of his voice.

The Creatures always wonder at words, sing like happiest shared breathing.

Hands tied, legs bound apart, a blindfold & gag for focus. I mount you after a long slow lick of your torso, a few sharp bites, & some moments just pondering what you can do for me.

Finally I climb on you, & mount you deep in me, & begin to ride you, a circular movement of my hips, I pull your cock in me this way & that, harder & harder, gyrating on you, hurting you a little more each & every time, my muscles tug orgasm out of you, & again, & I feel you begin to relax as men do, but a shift & I pull you back to attention, I take control of your muscles, blood, bone, compel action where there would not be, I feel your muffled panicked breathing & focus on it till it slows, calms, & I suck you deeper into me again & again.

You shudder harder than you ever have in me. *Abhhhhh.*

Someone there. Breathing softly. *Behind the wall.*

You limp out, silent, uninjured. Hands slack now. Good.

Soon none of the students will drink with me, or fuck me. A little lost. I close my curtains. Close my

door. Now dreaming in my bed always. *Unwilling the no*

Hurling my slight childly dream body against the wall, again, again. Aches, breaks. *Again, again.*

"Princess."

I pause, heaving.

"Princess!"

"Yes! You're there."

"I am. Please stop."

"I'm in & shut out both. Why? What this useless waking life?"

"I think . . . it's not enough to suffer."

"What else?"

"You have to confess what you believe, who you believe in, stand by them while the world disdains."

"What do I do?"

"I'll see you." I wake. Pain. *Shit.*

Clock radio. Schoolbooks.

I knew you in the store right away. A toy. Yet my friend. *Turtle not a turtle.* I carried you home like the whole dark world now had a gape to remembered light. I smiled to nobody's know. I listened.

The professor talks of evolution. Life from a sparkled speck in the sea. Doesn't look at short skirts or long.

I look at you in my bag, knowing the beginning, how it ended last time, what I am doing now. I confess what I believe.

Stands inside his practiced lecture, where raised hands are rare & eyes flutter near closed.

"This world is not alone among worlds. This universe is a blooming garden. Seeds landed here & took."

Someone laughs. Maybe someone else listens. The professor frowns & warns me of science learned from television, between the ads for sweets & beer.

I raise mine eyes to you, really, lay mine eyes upon you. Let you have my clothes, let them undress you into my grasp, will you into my breathing, kiss you into my insist, let you feed my breast feeding you, my love, my stupid mortal love, *ah*, now within me you see not the girl who you'd tried to fuck & consume, no, a star, *oh what a fucking supernova burst in your mind*, a moment, just a moment. A garden. Seeds landed. Took. You shudder like a woman. *Just like.*

Tonight I sleep smiling with you in my arms, & in the morning wake to you studying my face.

"What rhymes with the moon?"

I smile. Boop your little nose.

"I don't know either."

xlvi.

This world sexes up soft & close for a story, where the bones & chaos & blood might be aligned, dance

a friendly tune, & so I mull what I am trying to do & how to make my need into a pleasing myth.

I pack Boop in my knapsack & leave the room as I rarely do. I'm wearing a shirt one of them gave me, swirling white design on black, earth creatures embedded in the design. They like a good joke too.

Leave the knapsack casually half-closed so Boop can slyly see out. Down the street of brownstones to that old shop, I find a typing machine there. How men present their stories to others since fires & singing them not enough.

Boop dresses my hair long with flowers. I undress myself to write, offer myself plain to the Imp in the Moon, *help me to tell it, help me to sing it, make them heed.*

We begin in the local park, where some sleep & others grow vegetables. Boop will not have me go naked for the weather, but we agree I will make men listen with little more in dress. I hold my sheaf in the cold sunlight, & begin to read the words.

"There is a cavern, far below the earth, many tunnels lead to it, & we find ourselves watching as many Creatures gather, sniff twice, wonder what music, which games this time?" I read as though needing the sheaf but do not. These are things of my heart, I summon, *I summon.*

"There is on the surface high above this cavern an Island, & within that Island a Woods, a Castle, a Tower, a Dancing Grounds, & a Gate. A Tangled Gate." They listen, they gather. I have hardly begun to tell & yet more of them. Some for my breasts, loose among veils. Some because the words remember in them something. Something. I read & read again what I have brought until Boop pulls me to rest in my chamber.

We lay on my bed, curtains opened. I am exhausted but yet still quite awake.

"They believe books, Princess. As much as you in that park."

I nod. Let there be books. In them I tell all of the stories I remember, describe every small friend I've loved & now miss.

They believe. Many of them. Would me tell many more stories. But something about it. Still the world's cruelty, dirt, wars. Each sweeps his own front step. Someone paid tends the park where I still read.

Many who listen still have no home. The Way of the Creatures I describe is, to these devotees, a sweet candied dream.

I withdraw again. It matters. It doesn't. I have no more place among them to tend good anymore than their legends of suffering supermen & body-loathing gurus.

"You despair, Princess."

"I am angry and helpless. We do nothing here. I've changed little with my hands, my voice, my beliefs."

I sleep, days, nights, dreamless again until the full moon, its delighted imp.

Boop & I drink a tea of earth creatures, like those on my now-tattered shirt, we'd found them in abundance in the park, eager to play with the imp.

I let my body accelerate by them, I take Boop's paw, him too, we travel the distance, the light soft & solid beneath our feet as we climb, to arrive, to arrive.

A mile & an inch high before us, a delighted, mocking smile at our visit. Waiting, not waiting.

"Give me a useful word, imp," I command, ask.

"Eh?" her look unknowing the world below & its words.

"Just one," I say softly. Lift her in my hand, palm up, for her to snap & bite at.

"Nothing saves the world, this time or any other. Dreams are the salve for this."

Wait. *What?* Still staring at me, she said these words? Turn palm down to dis-jaw. She cackles high & low. Click-clicks & noise-noises. A face in my mind now as she's shooin' us away. Dreams the salve for failure. This man's face.

I will not accept this as enough.

Drink more of the tea, both of us, chase it deeper within.

xlvi.

Water, cold. Salt water, splashing. Choking to the surface, flailing. Another. *There is another.* We are together yet we can't help each other, except to begin to drown together.

A net. Tangled & dragged & choking suddenly both air & water & strong hands on us both, I feel her hand in mine for a moment. Squeeze. *We are saved.* Then we fall apart again as they take a look.

We are guised as girl-children & they remember to cover us up. That look of wonder & loathing remains with me. From curiosity to greed as we are reckoned the King's prize. A reward.

Other considerations. But two? They study us in our wet blankets & I find her hand again. She's more terrified than me. I breathe us together calm. *Breathe, sister. Breathe.*

We're bundled off to separate places on this old fishing boat. Another docks along side it that night. You were taken. You were terrified & taken from me. *I am so sorry. I remember now.*

I being to wake, to cry out, but Boop nuzzles me close, *Hmmms* deep into my grasp, draws me back in. These earth creatures are telling what I should know. *There's more.*

Eventually I am clothed in more than a wet blanket & the sniffs of me remain no more. The King will have his prize unmarked & we will have our reward. Paltry compared to the Travelers' gift, but his protection is more.

The ship lands on the Island as I have been thrust into a small windowless room to clean from

a pot & dress in cut-down clothes.

I am transferred from one tall set of weathered hands to smoother, gentler ones. Still, the same wonder, the same loathing. It is night when we arrive & so I see little of where I've come, where I shall long be.

At last, a room. A bedchamber. The door closed behind me. There are soft clothes on the bed but I push them aside & simply strip down. I feel the salt water, still, deeper than bathing. I feel my sister's hand. Her terror. I sit on this soft bed & look about me at the shapes of a princess's bedroom.

"I'm not a Princess," I say softly.

Toward dawn exhaustion gently takes me under & I feel myself slipping back deep into the waters, this time willing, this time I know she's there. *We will go together.*

A movement in the room. I withdraw from waters & see there is something about the wall opposite my bed. A . . . hole?

An odd-shaped hole in the wall, big enough to let me crawl through. I do. Nude & unknowing as I am of all this, I crawl through that hole to the first of many tunnels.

The White Bunny. The many giraffes & bears. The crazy imp. *The turtle not a turtle.*

"Boop!"

"Yes, Princess!"

"How does this help us? I'll wake soon & all this long gone. How are the earth creatures helping?"

"They brought me."

I start & look. A big, heavy, bald-headed man. Leather covered in ink decorations & jewelry. Now I am not in the cavern & tunnels. Just this room. Schoolbooks. Pink cat radio.

He eyes me but not as a man. Humor, not wonder & loathing. "I'm Benny Big Dreams."

Keeping held together, "I'm Iris."

"You're the Princess."

"Yes. And no."

He laughs, good & fleshed out for a dream figure. "I'll help you as I can."

A sudden pound at the door. "Keep the sex noises down to a dull roar! Not everybody's getting some!" I still my *Hmmm*, music to thank the earth creatures their gifts. *My sister. My path.*

xlix.

I don't see Benny Big Dreams again soon. My days are quiet. I go out again, to the park. Tend some vegetables, since they encourage me. There are earth creatures nearby & this calms me too. They tend cheerful despite all.

Sometimes men approach me. They are lonely. Sad. Mostly, wanting. Looking at me & wanting more than I have or know how to give.

Sometimes, when they are deep inside me, I am able to do a little something. Heal a bit. Undo some of the fray. They pull out of me, more wondering than before. Sometimes scared. Measuring their cocks for possible loss.

It gets colder. I am not doing well. My body is worn from sadness, from the casual harm some men do to me. I stop going out again.

"Princess."

We are under all of our blankets. A thick brown one especially, covered in bear faces. Protecting us as they can.

"Princess!"

"We have to find Benny."

He makes us a tea, brewed from the rest of the earth creatures we have, & he makes us both drink of them & chew them down.

"You're not well," he says softly, with breaking love.

"We'll ask Benny," I say & hug him.

Benny likes us to find each other as though by chance in one tunnel or another. Annoyed but agreed.

This time he makes it harder.

"Benny! Benny Big Dreams!" My dream body & voice are fine & full & intimidating.

He emerges, as though from rock. Bows to me, mocking. Wondering at what he is would lead me wondering what I am. I simply talk.

"I need your help."

He eyes me. "You're stalled."

"Worse."

Nods. "What are you trying to do?"

I start. Think. "The world is going to die again. I can't let it."

He laughs. "Can't you save it again? A twitch of your comely nose?"

"Yes. No. I'm not sure."

Now he's serious. "You need to become sure."



"I don't know what that means."

He stares me bluntly. "The world loses something in the saving. It's a little weaker after. You can't save it perpetually, even if you wanted."

I nod. This, then. "What do I have?"

He speaks softly now. "You lose something in the saving too."

"*Just tell me*, Benny." I feel Boop stiffen beside me, but say nothing.

"What did the imp say to you?"

"That the world can't be saved. That dreams salve this failure."

I weaken a little & he holds me, lightly but protecting.

"You don't believe her."

I shake my head. "I can't. There must be *something*."

"Tell the stories again, Iris. But tell new ones. Of a good place. Make it as real as dreams are. Make it safe, for Creatures new & old."

"Creatures? They live here, in these caves & tunnels."

He nods. "Yes, & in this new place you will create."

"Will I live there?"

"Do you wish it?"

I think, hard, this matters, I *think*.

"No. I can't. I can only live near. With Boop."

"There's more," Benny's voice so soft & gentle I am ready to cry aloud.

I nod.

"You'll let go living in this world for that one. Your powers will spend there to create but depart here."

"Will it help?"

He cackles softly, in reply.

/.

I hesitate. I let days pass by. There's more to do before letting go the world. *There must be*.

Then I find him, a new friend. He is a . . . little beagle puppy. I am asked to find him & take care of him.

"Where, Princess? Who is asking?" Boop's look is obvious.

I am feeling a little better. The days are warmer. Boop has found me more earth creatures & medicine. I don't ask what. And it's only to keep me going for awhile. While I decide.

I think. "She came to me in a dream. She said 'find him & take care of him while I am gone.'" Boop nods, sighs. Together we dress me in my tattered old earth creatures shirt & dress, he flowers my hair like old, & we go out. Not in my knapsack, though. I carry him in my arms, despite his worry.

We walk down to the park. A few of those living there remember my stories still. Smile at me.

Would protect me if need be. I gave them something to keep.

Then on to markets. To the toy store where I'd found Boop himself.

There. On an empty shelf. It's him.

"Algernon," she told me he's called," I say to Boop. "But she calls him Sonnyboy."

We return to our room. He is new & scared but he feels among friends now. He calms.

Delaying, feeling stronger. I find a job. I begin to tend my battered body. It's hard to do & I do not heal fully, but there are a few months, I remember, even now, when we three lived together in that room.

We lived together & I would go to my job every day. I would leave Boop & Algernon in the window to watch the day & wait for my return. I would come back in the evening, cook food, & they would tell me what they saw. The light passing differently on sunny & stormy days. Loud games in the street. The scents of wild berries & car exhaust. Tired faces, distracted & worried. They watched.

On the weekends, on Saturdays, I would heap them into my knapsack, & go to the cinema. After a few weekly visits, it seemed like it was the same film every week, which was strange. Stranger too is that the story advanced more each time.

It was called **RemoteLand**. It began, sometimes, with a car crash, sometimes in reverse. I would sneak Boop & Algernon into my lap & eat my candy bar & little sack of popcorn, & watch & watch. For awhile, not a Princess nor a Savior. Just three good friends.

It got stranger. The story shifted to an Island. A Kingdom. A tall Castle, a Tower, Dancing Grounds.

Then one week, a Gate. And telling *my story* though strangely with others peopling it.

"Benny," I growled.

He would not confess the film his doing. Just his usual nudgings.

"Soon, Iris, *soon*."

One day I did not go to work. I could not get out of our bed. Boop & Algernon clung to me with terror.

"OK, Benny," I said aloud to the dark room, its dusty schoolbooks. Its long-unplayed pink radio shaped like a cat.

Benny came for Algernon to bring him to the new place when it was time. "Trust me, Princess." I had no choice as I let him go.

Boop & I huddled together, no force of dreams or nature would rent us. Earth creatures now filled my room, since I was ready, & I did not have to drink or eat them. We went together, letting go to make new, *letting go to make new*.

I will see my sister again. *I will see Algernon again.*

In this new place I create, I take a new name. I am Christina, sometimes Chrisakah. The maker. The creator. The guardian of another new land. Crissy, for short.

We leave that room behind & come to this new place, where Boop & I will dwell alone all of our days, friends to & guardians of this other new place.

Our new home is green & hilly. The air is cool & lovely. I wish my friends from the park could live here in peace. But I have left them with my trace & no further. Benny will gentle their dreams sometimes, he promised me.

“There should be a Castle, Princess.”

I shake my head. “I’m not a Princess. I never was.”

Boop stares me down despite his shortness to my own. “A Castle we will build together. It can be . . . fun.”

“Fun?” I smile. Remember how.

“Like your stories. Rooms that come & go. And visitors too.”

“From where?”

“From the new place you will help to create.”

I nod. A Guardian who is a Princess living in a Castle. Boop will be my servant though I beg him not to be. He is sure. This will work.

I am not alone as the days pass. I live with Boop in our Castle. No dancing grounds. No Gate. It’s *all* Gate now. Benny cackles. The imp nods.

And so my story, from pieces I sometimes remember & so this picture to view. I call my new home Imagianna perhaps with more hope that I have.

One fine day, the finest, that beagle comes to the new land I have helped to create. I learn it is called Bags End. I think of the Red Bags & nod. One day them too.

He doesn’t remember me. Only who I took care of him for. His long-lost Mommy Beagle.

But he likes me & likes when I tell him stories. Likes it so much I arrange for my old typing machine to find its way into Bags End so that he can tell that place’s new stories.

My bedchamber is the same as it was on the Island long ago. Boop sleeps in my grasp, as always.

Sometimes I let us dream & find the old hole in the wall, & return again to the tunnels & cavern below the Tangled Gate. But it's only dreams, I know. Imagianna is where we are now.

[Benny nods. Keeps his distance mostly. It's for the best. Nothing's gone. Nothing goes away. Nothing returns. He does not see in time, then & now & hence. All points connect. Not yet for Crissy to remember this.]

[But he knows her sister is still looking for her. Her sister has forgotten nothing. Her sister is nearing Imagianna all the time, no time, every time. Soon.]



To be continued in Cenacle | 89 | June 2014

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Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His wonderful poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 85 | June 2013. I owe him a long ramble up a mountain, soon, very soon.

Charlie Beyer lives in Oreana, Idaho. His smart, crazy prose regularly appears in the pages of *The Cenacle*. Good to see he's digging up bones for a living, keeping his own extant. More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His fine poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 85 | June 2013. His poems in this issue are an expansion of the series as it appeared in *Cenacle* | 77 | 2011. More, Joe, more!

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. He's a crazy poet & a lovely man, & this periodical is all the more dandy in your hands for his regular contributions of poetry & artwork to it.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her beloved poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. I have lately learned that she is as much of a fan of bikes as I am. Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His excellent piece in the current issue is the latest of many derived from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.

A.S. Kay originally published her wonderful piece reprinted in this issue in the June 1988 issue of *Lucidity Letter*. No more information on her is available to the editor. But a deep thanks for your wonderful essay.

Czesław Miłosz was born in Szetejnie, Kovno Governorate, Russian Empire, in 1911, and died in Kraków, Poland in 2004. One of the greatest world poets of the 20th century, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980. His poetry in this issue was also reprinted in a volume in the 2007 Burning Man Books series (<http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>).

Catfish Rivers lives in Oak Ridge, New Jersey. His artwork last appeared in *Cenacle* | 81 | June 2012. His poem in this issue is his first for *The Cenacle*. He also hosts “The River’s Edge,” a legendary radio show on SpiritPlants Radio. Find his work online at catfishrivers.com.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Recently came off some scary medical work, doing better, getting back to his 4 a.m. routine of daily writing. Rock on, Tom!

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She is the finest partner in love & artwork that I could hope to find. Dear, dear one.

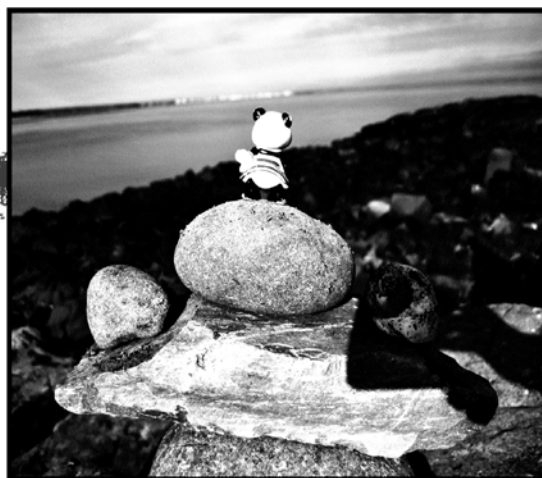
Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. It’s been now 20 Aprils of doing this journal, with a couple missing in there. I could not have imagined in 1995 what I or the world or this project would look like two decades later. Not bad, in at least some ways.

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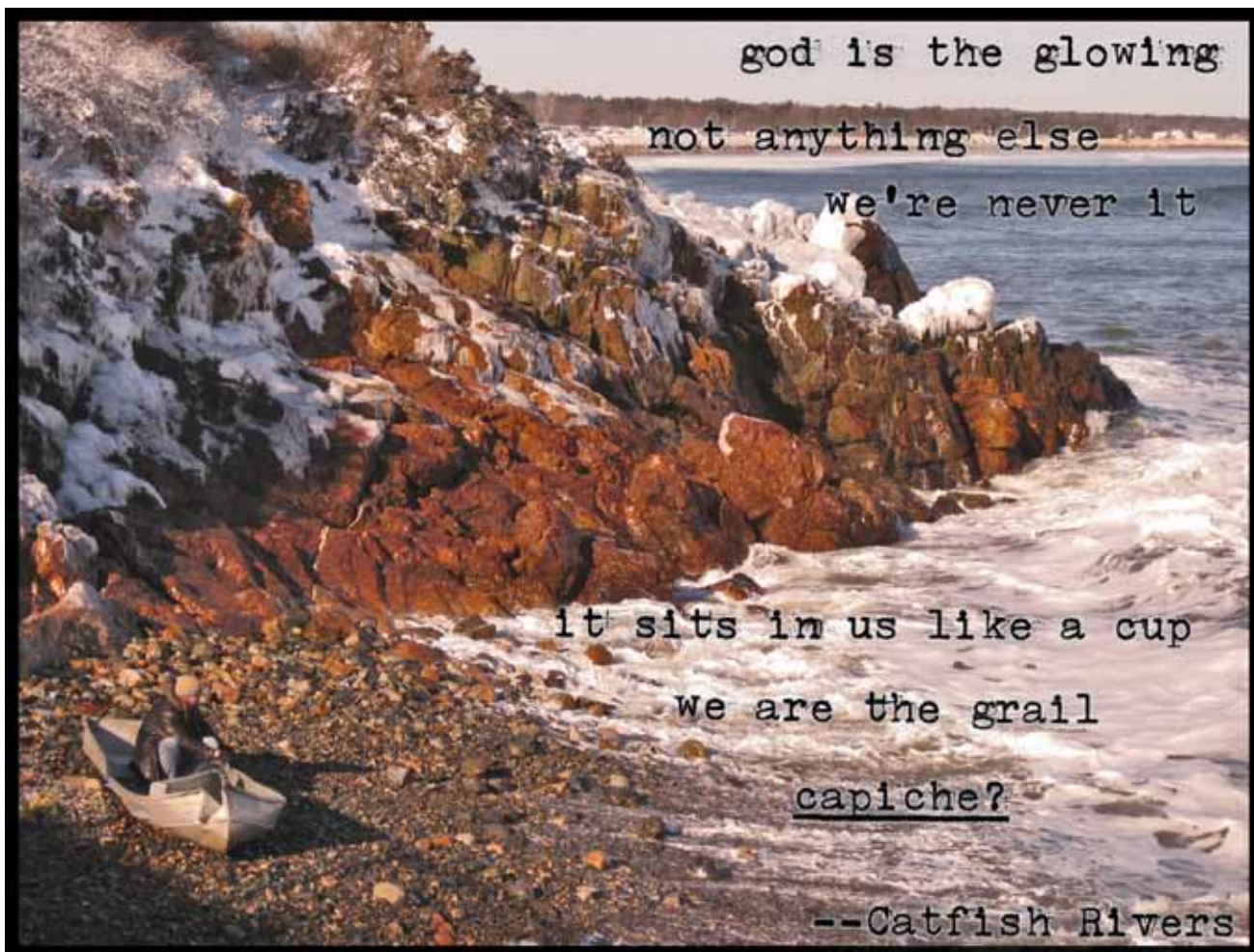
Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA. Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*; the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler* of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the Jellicle Literary Guild.

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we're never it

it sits in us like a cup

we are the grail

capiche?

--Catfish Rivers

